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At the Sign of the Silver Crescent

BY

HELEN CHOATE PRINCE

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AT THE SIGN OF THE SILVER CRESCENT

CHAPTER I

"By Jove, Paddy, this shows a fellow what Puvis de Chavannes means!"

The speaker was a young man of six or seven and twenty; the listener a well-bred fox terrier, named for Paderewski, partly because his hair was very short, but chiefly because his master owed a debt of gratitude to the great pianist for the pleasure that he had received at his hands (literally), and paid a part of it in thus showing his appreciation.

The scene that called forth the young man's admiration was a broad, green stretch of pasture, formerly the bed of the Loire, but now reclaimed by high dikes. Groups of stately poplars were scattered here and there, casting long blue shadows eastwards, and old women, seated on the heels of their sabots, kept an eye out for the cow or goat to which they were serving as nursemaid, while on the hillside across the placid river the Château of Amboise gleamed like a fabulous opal, touched by the westering sun with tints of violet, rose, and pale blue.

Grafton Blake drew a long breath of delight as he gazed at all this beauty ; it was what he was in search of. For three years he had been hard at work in Paris at his art, and this spring he had felt the need of striking out for himself, independently of schools and the influence of other artists. For this reason he had broken away from the beaten track, and was rewarded by finding at his first essay a bit of landscape that seemed too good to last, and that he feared might melt away before the next day. Spurred to action by this fear he turned to the terrier who was looking in his face with a wistful expression, now and then giving a tentative wag, and said: —

"I must get this bit, Paddy, and it 's a shame to waste at least two hours a day coming and going from Amboise. Do you suppose they could put us up in the village over there, eh?"

Paddy, rightly interpreting this remark as an invitation to walk, acted as if he had never before heard of such a treat, and wheeled round and round, chasing his stub of a tail and giving short barks of joy.

"All right," said his master. "As long as you approve, we 'll try it. Come on."

So saying Grafton strode along a cart track leading to a highway running parallel to the river, while Paddy made wide circles of discovery, now rousing a placid cow to an indignant protest, again snuffing and grubbing under a thorn-tree at some rabbit burrow. As the track approached the road

it became almost dignified enough to deserve the name of lane, bordered by hedges of white and pink thorn. The whole country was in its gala dress of mid-spring ; the early copper tints of the poplars still lingered, giving light and variety to the foliage, and the air was sweet with the fragrance of flowers. Grafton took it all in with keen delight. The lover of nature has an added sense after long absence from the presence of his mistress, and sees, hears, smells, and feels more acutely. The fields and the lane had pleased him, and he found a new satisfaction as he stepped up to the hard, well-cared-for road. He turned to the right, making for the cluster of houses that he had dubbed a village. On his left rose a high stone wall, evidently the boundary of some important estate, over which peered the upper branches of fine old trees. On the right side of the road the cottages of the hamlet straggled along, with their red-tiled, high-pitched roofs, their little gardens of mingled vegetables and flowers, and their frequent sleek cat sitting in the angle of the dutch door. Paddy was too well trained to do more than tremble with excitement when he saw his hereditary foes thus established in their citadels, while their catships merely opened their green eyes watchfully, the pupils dilating until all hint of danger had passed. Grafton walked on about a quarter of a mile before seeing any sign of an inn ; the wall always on his left, the row of small houses opposite. Then a break came in the monotony ; the wall turned sharply, a narrow road running up

a gentle hill by its base; opposite this right angle stood an old church, much out of repair, looking far too vast for the population of such a tiny place, and by its side, built high above the level of the thoroughfare on a terrace, was a substantial stone house. Grafton decided that this must be the presbytery, because of its proximity to the church, and also on account of a carved stone cross crowning its gable.

"The curé might take us in, if there's no inn," he pondered, when his eye was caught by a modest swinging sign, projecting from the front of a low, not very attractive looking house. The board bore the design of a silver crescent, and proclaimed in dingy letters that the hostelry was kept by Veuve Richer, who provided alike for man and horse.

Grafton hesitated; at first sight the place was not inviting; then he remarked that the panes of glass in the windows shone like jewels, that the white curtains were spotless, and, reflecting that it would do no harm to take a look about him, pushed open the door, and entered directly into a large room. The floor was neatly sanded; the small tables placed against the walls as clean as soap and sand could make them; the cloth spread over the billiard-table was fresh, and a flourishing fuchsia gave a touch of color.

"This is not so bad," thought Grafton, seating himself at one of the tables, and rapping with his stick. He heard a quick, decided step; an inner door opened, disclosing a gleam of shining copper

saucepans, and a woman entered. She was portly, and her jet-black hair arranged in thick braids under a snowy cap, her heavy gold earrings, and her dark eyes gave her a southern air.

"Monsieur desires?" she said politely.

"A glass of vermuth, if you please."

"Perfectly, monsieur. Dry?"

"Yes, dry."

She took a bottle from a corner cupboard where there were one or two bits of good porcelain, set it on the table before her guest, polishing the glass as she did so, and then lingered.

"What a nice little dog," she said, holding out her hand to Paddy; he responded at once. It is best to state here, so that there need be no sad awakening, that Paddy was a very cynical person; he always pretended to care for those who carried the key of the provision closet.

"This is a pretty country," remarked Grafton, sipping his vermuth. "Are there many artists about here?"

"No, monsieur, the saints be praised," was her prompt answer.

Grafton laughed, and then asked why she disliked the profession.

"Ah, if monsieur had any friends in the hotel line — asking his pardon for the suggestion — he would understand. Painters are a worthless lot, always out at the elbows, never able to pay their bills. And the worst of them is that they all have such smooth, flattering tongues it is next to im-

possible for a poor landlady to get the upper hand of them. I have a cousin, I who tell you, and she kept a beautiful inn in Normandy, which paid her well until those painting fellows came, and now she is ruined! Her daughter has no *dot*, and her nice dining-room is quite spoiled by the daubs those good-for-nothings have smeared over the walls."

"What if I should tell you that I am a painting fellow myself?" asked Grafton.

She threw back her head, and laughed, showing a row of strong, white teeth.

"I should say that monsieur liked his little joke as do all young gentlemen."

"Why do you consider it improbable?"

"Strolling artists don't wear London clothes; they don't wear good gloves; they have no ring like monsieur's" — she pointed to an antique intaglio on Grafton's little finger. "If they have any ring at all, it is a big make-believe diamond — and that 's generally at the pawn-shop. Besides, begging monsieur's pardon, monsieur looks so clean."

It was Grafton's turn to laugh, which he did heartily; then, putting on a stern frown, he said:

"You have wounded me in my tenderest feelings, madame, for know this: I, I who tell you, am a painting fellow, and a very poor one, too."

For a moment she looked puzzled, and then her face brightened as she said: —

"Ah, then monsieur paints for his pleasure, just

as monsieur le baron at the château makes music for his."

"I 'm afraid that my own pleasure is all that my brush has ever stirred; but seriously, I am a painter, and I want to find a place near here where I can spend two or three weeks. I want to make a study of something I saw this afternoon. I will pay in advance any reasonable price. Do you know of any rooms here?"

"If monsieur will take the trouble to step upstairs he may find something not too bad."

"There may be some corner where I could manage ten days," thought Grafton as he followed the landlady, who had taken a bunch of keys from a nail above the chimney-piece. She led him through an ordinary, narrow entry, but, instead of going up the stairs in front of them, opened a small door beyond that gave directly on a winding staircase of stone, which seemed to be built in a tower. A dim light shone through slits cut in the thickness of the walls at irregular intervals, the opening at the exterior being perhaps four inches wide, and flaring inwards to the width of two feet. Madame Richer paused at the first landing, a little out of breath, and, choosing from the bunch of keys one which might have served a stage jailer, she turned it in the lock of a solid door, and, begging Grafton's pardon for going before him, entered a dusky apartment and threw open the shutters. The light streamed in, showing a noble room, the ceiling decorated with oak beams, on

which could be seen traces of gilding; two windows deeply recessed gave a wide view of the very meadow where Grafton had been earlier in the day, which spread its ample carpet beyond the boundary of a small, trim little garden nestling close to the house. Opposite the windows was a genuine Louis XI. fireplace, its massive hood projecting into the room, and with rough stone pillars standing guard on each side of two gigantic, black iron fire-dogs. Some old chairs were set stiffly about a large, ordinary deal table, and two ancient black-oak sideboards stood against the walls.

"There is a small bedroom beyond, in the north tower," said Madame Richer, smiling to see her guest's evident surprise at this unexpected, almost princely apartment in the little inn.

"How does this come here?" he asked after a pause.

"Ah, monsieur must know that long, long ago this room was but a part of a large manor-house, which has little by little fallen into dust, except this remnant. My predecessor bought the old ruin for a song, pulled most of it down, and built the new inn with the old materials, using the two towers and this room for a support. It is said, but I can't say how true it is, that in the olden days a very great and beautiful lady, who lived over yonder at Chenonceau, used to visit the château up on the hill — monsieur may have read of the lady in his history book? She was called Diane de Poitiers."

"I have heard her name."

"Then monsieur knows that she was rich, and more powerful than the queen. Well, it is said that when she came on her grand visits to the château, her servants were so many that they could not all be lodged there, so some of them were put up in this manor-house. It is for this that the inn bears the crescent, which was her sign."

"Can you let me have these two rooms?" asked Grafton, coming to business.

Madame Richer's whole face changed; the national game of bargaining was about to begin, and she must find out her opponent's strength. So she shrugged her shoulders, and said indifferently: —

"I don't believe that monsieur would be satisfied with them."

"That 's for me to decide, and I like them. Are they already engaged?"

"N-n-o, not exactly."

"Well?"

"I 'm afraid the price is rather high; my vines have hardly paid me for three years. In '95, when the wine was extra, my American grafts had not begun to bear, and" —

"Whether I can pay your price is also for me to decide," broke in Grafton, decidedly impatient.

He had lived in Paris heretofore, and had not learned that in the country the preliminaries to a contract are part of the fun of life; to display his quickness of wits over the loss or gain of five francs is as exciting to a peasant as winning a chess tour-

nament is to a champion player. So when Madame Richer, her hands on her hips, balancing from one neat foot to the other, named a price that struck Grafton as exceedingly moderate, he closed at once, utterly regardless of the etiquette in Touraine on such occasions. The landlady's face fell.

"Monsieur is not English, then?" she asked before giving a decided answer.

"No; American from Boston in the United States."

"Ah! My mother had a second cousin who settled in Buenos Ayres," she said, diverted for a moment. "I wonder if monsieur has heard of him? He was a hatter, named Dubois, and made for the best families."

"I think that he was perhaps before my day," said Grafton cautiously, well knowing the futility of trying to impress any idea of distance on a race whose standard is based on the boundary lines of France. "But," he went on, "if you are worried about taking in a stranger, I will pay in advance, and as for references, I can write to Paris, and get no end of them."

At this remark the vague dejection grew into marked indignation. Had she been so maladroit as to let monsieur think that she did not know a gentleman when she saw such a superb specimen? She, she who had lived in great houses, although only as a servant, still could tell good breeding. No, no, not a sou of monsieur's money would she touch until he had assured her that she had earned it.

"Do you object to dogs? Paddy is a good little fellow," said Grafton, striving to discover the cause of her reluctance.

Paddy, well knowing, the rascal, that he was the subject of conversation, slowly rose on his hind legs, and looked in her face with such an appealing expression that few could have resisted him; certainly not a Frenchwoman whose love of domestic animals seems to be bred in the bone. Madame Richer patted him with approbation, and said warmly that she adored dogs, and if monsieur pleased, she would send to Amboise for his belongings at once. In spite, however, of the geniality of her voice, there was still the thin veil of sadness, and all through his life Grafton never knew that she had been keenly disappointed at gaining half a dozen unexpected francs, and losing half an hour's keen, intellectual delight.

But this mood wore itself away, and when she returned after giving the order for the cart to be sent to Amboise, she was in high good humor. In her hand she held a bundle of dry twigs and a newspaper, and announced her intention of lighting a fire at once, as the evenings were still chilly, and the room had been long closed. She held the paper, lighted at one end, up the black, yawning throat of the chimney, and when the draft caught it, and it had flown roaring up to the sky, plainly seen above, she kindled the fagot, and told Grafton that she would prepare his dinner.

He lighted a cigarette, and stretching out his

legs to the blaze, Paddy curled up between them, he fell into a reverie.

In every life there are moments when we step up, as it were, on to a higher grade, and looking back see the past in a clear perspective, as it is impossible to do when we are living it.

Twice in Grafton's life there had been these illuminating glimpses. Up to the age of perhaps eleven, he had been much like most boys, unthinking, unreflecting little animals. He had shirked his lessons as much as he dared; he had resented the ignominy of being made clean every evening (as if once a day was n't bad enough), in order to spend half an hour in the drawing-room with his mother, who invariably found some fault with his toilet in spite of all his nurse's pains; he had played hard at baseball and other games with his schoolmates, indulging in more than an occasional fight; he had said his prayers at night when he was not too sleepy, because his dear old grandmother Blake had asked him to, and although she had died when he was only six, her memory was a green and pleasant spot in his heart. It had never occurred to him that other homes were happier, or other boys more loved than he, until one spring afternoon when he stood on the front steps of his father's house, idly kicking one muddy toe with a still muddier heel, — "scuffing," as nursery-maids used to call the trick. It was a holiday, and he had nothing to do. All the boys were claimed by their families; one was going fishing in the

country with his father; another had given a glowing forecast of a matinée performance at the theatre; even his best-loved friend, Tommy Mason, had told him with tactless glee that he was going to drive with his parents.

So this soft April afternoon, when the mere touch of the air suggested merry-making, Grafton stood doing nothing, watching the unending stream of carriages as they rolled gayly by. The trees in the park, or "common," opposite the house, were delicately traced against the sky; on each side of the steps was a row of hyacinths in full bloom, standing proudly each in an Indian jar, and filling the air with their overpowering fragrance. The people on foot all looked happy, as if they were coming from or going to some festivity. Suddenly Grafton was aware of a familiar face in the procession of carriages, and saw with a pang that was not quite envy, although something like it, Tommy Mason sitting beside the groom behind his father and mother. The horses were going at a good pace, and Tommy had only time to stick out his tongue at his friend. It was not done ill-naturedly, only from the superabundance of his glee, and Grafton did not resent it. He, in return, made a grimace that nearly sent Tommy from his perch, he laughed so immoderately at what he considered a mark of genius, but Grafton had no smile on his face. He remained where he was; always the same atmosphere of mirth and happiness, only he was left out. At this moment his

father's tilbury, driven by the groom Dixon, a special friend of Grafton's, drew up before the house.

"Hullo, Dixon," said Grafton. "That 's a new horse you 've got there, is n't it?"

"Yes, Master Grafton," said the man, grinning pleasantly. "She 's a mare from New York State your father bought last week."

"She 's good-looking," returned Grafton, feeling of her legs in a knowing manner.

"I don't like her eye; you can see white above, and that 's a nasty sign," answered the groom dubiously.

His confidences were cut short by the front door being opened, and the appearance of Mr. Blake on the threshold.

If there was one person whom Grafton considered the perfection of manhood, it was his father. He wondered how other boys felt whose fathers were not tall and burly, with a high color and a long, drooping mustache. He gazed with wistful admiration at him as he stood drawing on his driving-gloves, old Barker the butler holding the door open behind him, and he decided that when he was old he would have just such a white box-coat with huge pearl buttons, and wear his hat a little bit on one side, and always carry an overgrown carnation in his buttonhole.

"Hullo, kid!" said Mr. Blake, staring at the new mare, but addressing his son. "What are you up to?"

"Nothing," said Grafton dolefully. "Oh, papa, I *wish* you 'd take me to drive. All the other fellows are out with their fathers."

Mr. Blake patted the boy's head.

"I can't to-day," he said. "I 'm going out of town to a man's dinner, but to-morrow I 'll take you with me. Here 's a dollar for you."

He put a piece of silver into Grafton's hand, stepped into the tilbury, gathered the reins cautiously in his hands, while Dixon sprung to his side, and in another minute the mare had carried him into the misty blue perspective of the long street.

The dollar was nice, the promise for to-morrow better still, but Grafton was not yet satisfied. A doubtful light came into his eyes.

"Master Grafton, your ma says you are to get off the steps at once. You have messed 'em all up with your muddy shoes, and when you come in you 're to go by the back door."

The boy became conscious of himself. He stared at his stubbed-out boots as he walked slowly away, and he felt that he had no place in that beautifully appointed house, where even the master was not allowed to smoke or invite his friends to dinner. He knew this, for at long intervals both his father and mother were at home at the luncheon hour, and the meal was as a rule enlivened by bitter reproaches and recriminations. Grafton did not know how sad it was that these quarrels failed to impress him as anything unusual. If he had

reflected on the subject he would have said that probably all married people were the same. But to-day his eyes had been opened a little: he thought how happy Mr. and Mrs. Mason had looked side by side; his mother never drove with her husband; she had her horses quite apart from his.

Grafton took a long walk that afternoon, choosing dingy streets where he felt in harmony with the surroundings, where well-polished boots would have been more of an anomaly than his muddy ones. He knew that at this hour his mother was in her drawing-room, that Barker had brought in the dainty tea-table, and that she was pouring out cups of tea for soft-voiced women, and men in long frock coats. He could picture it all, the rose-tinted light when Barker had lighted the lamps, the subdued laughter, the picturesque attitude of his mother in an exquisite tea-gown, and the tone of a misunderstood woman adopted by her, which he half divined with an angry throb at his heart.

Youth is often generous, seldom just, and Grafton was in a tumult of love for his father; the thought did not for a moment occur to him that there might be faults on both sides.

He came home tired out, and as soon as his head touched the pillow he fell into a profound sleep; so profound that he heard nothing of the confusion in the house in the chill, early dawn, although the tread of men, heavy and stumbling as

if staggering beneath a load, went by his open door; the hysterical scream of a maid, as she saw all that remained of her master placed in the room that had been his, did not disturb the sleeper, whose right hand held tight, under the pillow, a silver dollar.

The next morning he was wakened by his mother, who stood by his side as carefully dressed and composed in her appearance as if the night had not been one of horror. She told him that his father had been killed in an accident on his way home from a dinner. She showed no emotion, and he listened dry-eyed, suppressing his tears until she had left him.

From that day his nature developed itself; the memory of his father faded as time went on, but the ideal that he represented to the boy deepened. Death is the great idealist, and under his transforming touch the good-natured, careless, faulty man became to his son the symbol of all that is brave and good. Thus his death became a source of benefit, which his life never would have been. In deference to what he imagined would have been the wishes of his father, Grafton became ambitious in his studies, and, after the necessary schooling, entered Harvard University with flying colors. There, owing to his vigorous physique, he was able to keep up the standard of scholarship that he had set for himself, and also to become a member of the 'varsity crew, and one of the best heavy-weight boxers of his class. He was admired

rather than loved by his classmates, for something in his character forbade easy intimacy, but he was popular, and a member of several clubs. As the years went by, and his hands no longer required supervision, while his shoes ceased to be a cause of distress to Barker, his mother grew proud of her grave, dignified son; but so deep was his reserve that neither she nor any one else dreamed of his real nature. All unsuspected by others was his sense of the heavy responsibility of life, and half unsuspected by himself, the artistic chords that vibrated to certain touches, stirring him to an unrest of mingled pain and pleasure. He could not have explained why he loved nature so passionately; why certain lines of poetry thrilled through him; or why his most delightful moments were those when with unaccustomed fingers he started a picture that was to equal, if not surpass, any modern master, and his most despairing ones when, after hours of work, he cast the muddy daub from him in disgust.

It was towards the end of his last year at the university that the second glimpse of his life as it was, and as it might be, came to him.

One May morning he had rowed up the river with the tide, and, as he had gone as far as he wished, he landed in a pretty spot, and threw himself down on the bank waiting for the tide to turn. On the opposite shore an apple orchard in full bloom poured its fragrance out on the soft breeze that wafted it to Grafton where he sat; a golden

robin flew by with a dash of glory; a cock crowed in a distant farmyard. Of a sudden he began to think of himself, and as he thought he grew indignant.

"It 's infernal ingratitude, that 's what it is!" he exclaimed energetically, sitting straight up. "Here am I, young, strong as an ox, plenty of money, plenty of friends, and the minute I get away by myself I settle into a condition of regular fault-finding. What 's the matter with me that I can't smell a flower, or hear a bird sing, without a feeling of pain? What 's the matter with me?"

Then as he sat staring over the sunny fields a miracle was worked for him, quietly, as most miracles are worked, so that the touch of the divine finger on his eyelids was imperceptible, yet lo! suddenly where he had been blind, he saw; and what he saw was old Mother Nature holding open her arms to him, and what his ears heard was her voice saying to him: "Come, my child; I am what you are groping after! Put your head on my breast, and listen to the mighty throb of my heart! Learn my secrets."

And Grafton listened, and grew wise. He realized dimly that he had suffered from his over-love for the world's beauty, and he saw his way clear now. He would be an artist; he would lose the sense of being an alien by thrusting himself into Nature's workshop; he would turn the pain into joy.

He had rather dreaded telling his mother that

his plans for the future were of a nature quite unlike anything of which she had ever dreamed. But to his surprise and relief she accepted his decision with graciousness, and threw herself into his ideas with as much enthusiasm as she could command. In fact, she had been looking forward with something like dismay to having her son take up his abode once more beneath her roof. She had thoroughly enjoyed her freedom from all masculine rule during the past four years, and she had foreseen that Grafton was one to have his own way, although he would never bluster as his father used. So, as he had inherited two thirds of Mr. Blake's fortune, which made him comfortably if not brilliantly rich, she could not imagine a career more suitable.

She wrote to a cousin who had married very well in France, and who spent each season in an aristocratic old hotel in Paris, asking her to keep a friendly eye on Grafton, and introduce him to "nice" people; for of course the pilgrim of art has but one shrine nowadays, and Grafton's steps were set towards the great French capital. His mother superintended the packing of his boxes herself, concealing his belongings with such care that he hunted vainly for them afterwards. She opened every package that he had done up himself, and scattered its contents among her small brown holland bags as she saw fit.

"How careless gentlemen are about money," she said to the maid who was nominally working under

her direction, really standing idly by. "Mr. Grafton has put a silver dollar in a dressing-case that is to be forwarded direct to Paris; as if it could be of any use to him there! Put it in his purse on the table, please."

Grafton was surprised at the regret he felt when he opened the case on his arrival in Paris, and missed the bit of silver that he had kept for many long years; he supposed that the maid had taken it, and saw the uselessness of mentioning the affair.

His mother's cousin was very kind to him, and as she had made a brilliant marriage for her only son she was charmed to have a good-looking, agreeable young man on terms of intimacy at the dingy old hotel. Thanks to her hospitality, Grafton saw as much as he wished of the best society that Paris has to offer, and might have seen more but for the intense absorption with which he threw himself into his work. For more than three years, with the exception of a holiday now and then, he had given all his time to his mistress, and was already spoken of respectfully by the "men who know."

And so we come down to the hour when he is sitting before the fire in the Silver Crescent, wondering why he feels so much at home, and is not more curious about his new surroundings. His mind had run back to his old home, and he was thinking of the last time he saw his father; then the memory of the hour that decided his life-

work flashed into his thought, but not being given to self-examination or introspection, it did not occur to him that this might be another landmark in his journey through the world, this chance that had placed him in new scenes.

The landlady interrupted his reverie by entering with a fresh white cloth thrown over her arm, followed by a man-of-all-work, bearing a table which he put in the recess of one of the windows, and proceeded to arrange for Grafton's dinner.

Madame Richer stood watching him, her arms akimbo, occasionally casting an approving glance in the direction of her lodger, who thoroughly pleased her woman's eye. She admired his vigorous, sturdy figure, which gave an impression of being in training, it was so hard and firm. She liked his round, rather combative head, covered with close-cut, dark brown hair; she also thought well of his short, straight nose, and square chin. At first sight Grafton impressed one by his appearance as a well-bred looking fellow, whose proper sphere was in and of the world, practical, and wide-awake. But the close observer found hints of his artistic temperament in the full, sensitive curves of his lips, in the occasional far-away, impenetrable expression of his gray eyes, and in his hands. They were strong, capable hands, finely finished, with supple fingers, more those of a surgeon than of an athlete.

The dinner verified Madame Richer's boast that she had lived with gentlefolk in her time.

Everything was perfect of its kind, down to the sparkling white wine, in which she drank a health to monsieur at his request, remarking with delight that she was never deceived in her instincts as to whether people were *comme il faut*.

As she served him her tongue was as busy as her hands, and she chattered volubly about the neighbors.

"First, monsieur was to understand that the château is no longer the property of monsieur le marquis, although he still lives there with his daughter, Madame la Baronne Ernst."

"I 've heard of her in Paris; she 's very pretty, is n't she?"

"She 's called so now that she 's covered with jewels and rich clothes; but when she was a poor little girl without any *dot* the people about here thought that she was too pale and that her hair was too light. My taste is for a girl with a good bright color in her cheeks."

"Is the château handsome?" asked Grafton, with an eye to the picturesque.

"Oh, splendid, now that the baron has put it in order with his money. New hangings on the walls, new horses in the stables, all the vines renewed, and a hundred men at work on the place, when three years ago there were only about five old paupers."

"You are progressive, madame," said Grafton, pushing back his chair.

"I am of no party, monsieur," she answered

solemnly. "But I love prosperity, and what does it matter to me if the money that makes things thrive comes out of the pocket of a Jew or a Christian? Besides, the baron is a good Catholic; did n't the Holy Father give him his title because he was so good? If I must choose between the two, give me the baron who scatters his money like water, so they say, instead of that miserly old poet, who fights over every centime in a just bill!"

"Who is the original of that charming portrait?"

"Monsieur Vernon, who lives in a white house a kilometre up the lane, the mean old skinflint! If it was n't for his dear little daughter, I 'd burn his barn down some windy night, that I would!"

Madame Richer's eyes burned with such intensity as she said this that Grafton thought a match would be a superfluity in case she carried out her little plan. But as he looked they softened, and grew tender, while she said with a caressing voice: —

"Ah, dear Mademoiselle Suzette! She could lead me like a little goat. I am one that cannot be driven, monsieur, but I follow, I follow."

She had the face of an angel as she made this symbolic statement, but a second later, the unfortunate serving-man having delayed in bringing up monsieur's coffee, she raged with temper, and sent a whole volley of abusive epithets down the winding stairs, with the result that the frightened Denis came stumbling in with the air of a sheep in the shambles with its legs tied together.

Grafton, amused but pitying Denis, broke in with a question intended to divert her attention.

"The presbytery is a nice-looking house. Have you a good curé?"

Madame Richer's whole manner changed abruptly; her very voice was reserved as she replied: —

"Yes, it 's an excellent house. The curé lives there with his sister."

"What are they like?"

"Mademoiselle Mathilde is very pious; she embroiders beautifully."

"And the curé himself?" persisted Grafton.

She looked hastily over her shoulder as if she heard a sound; then, "Ah, monsieur le curé is a man of God; they are all good," she replied in a voice that might have been the refinement of sarcasm or one of perfect innocence.

And so ended the gossip of the first evening spent by Grafton in his new quarters.

CHAPTER II

For nearly five hundred years the old château, from which the village took its name of Beaulieu, had been in the family of the Marquis de Beaulieu; the weather-vanes on the conical towers bore the heraldic device of his ancestors, who had carved their way with their swords through warlike ages; every stone in the massive pile, every oak in the park, seemed to the marquis to have had a hand in his making, — and now the place was his no longer.

The family de Beaulieu had been able in old times to acquire wealth by its powerful arm, but it had never had the faculty of keeping it. So in this degenerate century what was the old nobleman to do when, his wife dead, he was left alone with his little daughter, and saw his revenues diminish year by year? His vines, which had formerly brought in large sums to him, were destroyed by phylloxera; his sheep were attacked by a contagious disease and died in heaps; his late wife's fortune seemed to melt away in some mysterious manner; it was enough, the marquis used to declare, for him to invest in any company, to have it prove a bubble of speculation. A de Beaulieu cannot work, so the last male of the noble race bowed his head meekly to what he called the will of God, and resolutely shut his eyes to the future.

He lived all the year round in one wing of his huge home with his child Diane, and as long as there was enough money to keep one or two saddle horses for him, and a pony for her, he forgot his evil fortunes, and passed his days happily in a way, hunting in the season, studying and trying to organize the old family papers, and praying the saints to bring back the Bourbons to the throne of France.

His delight was to tell Diane of the ancient splendors of their family, and many a long winter evening was spent by them before the fire, the wind raging without, while he described the faded glories of the past. The young girl listened, but the alchemy of youth turned the father's chastened pride in the past of his race to a self-aggrandizing belief in its future. She was a child of her epoch; it is hard to tell how the knowledge of the world's allurements had crept into her lonely and sheltered life, but there it was; and as she listened to her father's tales, her deep eyes, the color of a wave before it breaks into foam, would lighten into enthusiasm, and while he read from some old parchment accounts of revels that had made these same walls ring, she would plan her own actions for the future. He, with his melancholy, dreaming gaze turned backward, never imagined the vivid hopes that lured her vision forward.

When Diane was about eighteen, an aunt, her father's only sister, recalled the fact that there were two members of her family living in the old

home, and made a sudden swoop down on them. The good aunt Amélie was one of those restless women who must ever be doing; she would have made an excellent business man, but in her limited sphere her capacities were too large for the material on which they were expended. She had made advantageous matches for her two daughters, and longed for more chances to display her talents. To marry Diane well would be an ostrich feather in her cap, for name and family pale before money nowadays, and it would not be easy work to find a suitable husband for her dowerless niece.

She held up her hands in dismay over the palpable signs of decay about Beaulieu, but she scanned Diane approvingly.

"It 's a great pity you have not kept her in a convent; she would be more pliable," she said to her brother in a loud whisper that Diane overheard. "Still, I think she 'll do. At any rate we can try, and you must bring her to me in Paris after New Year's."

Monsieur de Beaulieu felt that the time had come for him to lose his child, and his heart grew heavy within him. Diane felt that the time had come for which she had always longed, and her heart beat high with hope.

She knew that she was pretty, and moreover she knew that she was of a type much admired for the moment in the great world. She was fully aware of the elegance of her slender figure, and rejoiced that nature had given her a faultless skin, fine

features, and an air of distinction. The minute that the invitation of her aunt was accepted, she set to work with the small sum her father could give her, and spent day after day superintending the village dressmaker. She planned and invented, and only Heaven knows what wild dreams flitted through her charming blonde head as she bent it over the long seams that she stitched on daily. She did not doubt for a second that she would receive all the admiration in Paris that she coveted. In the first place she was a Beaulieu; that made her the fit mate for the noblest, and as she thought of her family she unconsciously held her head more proudly. Then after her name came her beauty. She would never return to the dear old place Diane de Beaulieu; of that she was sure. She decided that if other things were equal, she would prefer to marry a prince; a duke was one stage better, to be sure, but princess was such a pretty title. She was very young, poor little Diane, as she sewed up the seams of her first long dress, in spite of all the superficial knowledge that she possessed.

When the preparations were all completed, and they took the train for Paris from Amboise, she had no farewell tenderness for the honest servant who had driven them to the station in the funny, old-fashioned carriage, drawn by two ill-matched farm horses; she was ashamed of the absurd equipage, and wished that her father would ask for first-class tickets in a louder voice, so that the by-

standers might think better of them. She enjoyed seeing the station master bow to them with deference, and wondered if he would recall this day when she came back a princess, and if the old woman who sold "Le Petit Journal" would tell her children how the young lady who had gone away so quietly had given her a smile as she held her basket of newspapers to the carriage window. All through the journey she was in a tumult of expectation.

Aunt Amélie welcomed her brother and niece warmly. She had already begun the preparations for the campaign, and, after a week devoted to dancing lessons, she escorted Diane to her first ball. It was only a *bal blanc* for young débutantes, but the girl felt that it was her first chance, and followed her aunt into the dressing-room with her heart beating violently. The room was full of young girls with their mammas, and in one glance Diane saw just where the village dressmaker had failed with her white gauze. For a second her high spirits received a shock; then, as she allowed the maid to take off her wraps, she observed to herself that, however well dressed the bevy of girls might be, there was not one as pretty as she. She looked with satisfaction at their shoulder blades, and found not one really lovely neck; then she threw a quick glance over her own shoulder at the mirror, and caught a glimpse of the two delicious dimples showing discreetly above the tucker in the low-cut waist of the now despised gauze.

It was depressing, however, to observe the well shaped slippers each girl displayed when the maid took off the velvet overshoes. Diane knew that her own feet were small, with high insteps, and slender lines, but she kept them well beneath her skirt, and untied her own outer shoes, with a displeased frown at their clumsy coverings, which she had thought so well of at home. In person she was by far the prettiest girl there; but a glance at the mirror reflecting the entire group showed her her own want of air and comparative insignificance. It was not that her dress was so bad in itself, she decided, but it was the silk under-petticoats, the hundred costly details that she had not, and whose existence she had not suspected before seeing, that made the difference. Her brain was hard at work as she stood modestly waiting for aunt Amélie to finish a whispered conversation with an ancient and bearded dame in a corner. She would not go to another ball so poorly dressed, she decided, if she never stirred from home again.

"I must hold my head high, just the same," she thought to herself. "If you look meek, they 'll take it for granted that you are."

So she kept her fine, patrician little nose well up in the air, although she was angry and humiliated at heart, and pulled up her gloves with an air so haughty that the good-natured girls, giggling and fluttering about, felt a little afraid of her. When aunt Amélie called her to be introduced to her martial-looking friend, however, Diane made a

very becoming little curtsy on hearing one of the best names in France, and was pleased to catch an approving note in the lady's voice as she retreated to her former place at a nod from her aunt. She looked at the débutantes about her; they were comparing their sensations, and Diane listened amused and scornful. One declared that she knew fate destined her for a wallflower. "I believe she 's not far wrong," thought Mademoiselle Diane, scanning the red, amiable face of the speaker. Another said that for her part she was frightened to death, and wished she were at home; then all the others broke into a chorus of "And I! And I!" Diane lifted her delicate, arched black eyebrows, and her mouth turned down a little at the corners; what mutton-heads they all were, she reflected with energetic scorn. She was quite sure that once in the ballroom her beauty, her wit, would give her the lion's share of devotion. She knew that she was amusing; she always made her father's friends enjoy themselves on the rare occasions when they dined at Beaulieu after a hunt; she was at her ease with men, and not in the least afraid of them like these silly creatures. Her whole frame was vibrating with impatience when at last aunt Amélie shook out the folds of her red velvet, and tossed the plumes in her hair like a battle-horse sniffing the conflict from afar, as she ambled across the room, and told Diane to follow her, to stand straight, and turn her toes out. Such a nice, obedient little pawn, the old lady

thought to herself, the whole game already planned in her shrewd head. What a surprise it would have given her to read the will and energy covered by Diane's blonde curls!

They made their bows to their hostess, who said a few civil things to them, and then moved to a bench running along the wall, so as to make way for other guests. Diane lowered her lashes in the most conventional manner, but she was quite self-possessed, and caught every detail. The slippery floor, all ready for her to glide over, in the arms of the most attractive partners; the mingled odor of the perfume from the ladies' dresses and the flowers decorating the apartment; the hum of voices, subdued at first, but growing louder as the hidden musicians began a waltz. It was all intoxicating, and all for her. An elderly gentleman, with a glass in one eye and mephistophelian eyebrows, led a stout married lady into the middle of the floor, and for a few moments they danced there alone; but gradually the group of young men by the door seemed to gather courage from example, and one by one slipped away to ask the white-robed girls for a turn.

Two men, rather more distinguished looking than the common run, stood by the mantelpiece talking together. Diane was attracted by their air, and kept them well in sight. She was sure that they had noticed her, and felt a throb of pride as she saw one stroll up to the hostess, and say something in her ear. She threw a discreet glance

in Diane's direction, and then spoke rapidly for a moment, shrugging her shoulders a good deal, and spreading her hands out; the young man nodded emphatically, and sauntered back to his companion. In a few moments he was seen bowing before that giggling girl with a red face.

"That," said aunt Amélie, following Diane's glance, "is Mademoiselle de Salbris; she is a great heiress, and will make a brilliant marriage."

"It 's lucky for her she has money, for she 's ugly enough to frighten a monkey into fits," said Diane.

Aunt Amélie could not believe her ears. She was a trifle deaf, and there was a great deal of noise in the room, so she only smiled vaguely, and threw a wondering look about her, to see if any one else had heard her niece's supposed remark. As there was no horror to be seen on the faces nearest her, she decided that she had mistaken the words, and relapsed into serenity.

"Ah," she said suddenly, "there is a — ahem, a friend of mine, who will want to dance with you, my dear. Good-evening, Monsieur Belfort," she continued, with a beaming smile. "I wondered where you were."

"I have been dining with my late mother-in-law," said the newcomer in a husky voice.

"In her tomb?" asked Diane sweetly. She knew how rude she was, but could not help it. The round, fat little man gazed at her steadily for a moment, and went on in the same husky voice as

if he had not heard her. "I mean with the mother of my late wife."

Aunt Amélie was quite at sea. She knew that she had heard Diane say something outrageous this time, but Monsieur Belfort's unmoved countenance bewildered her, and still smiling she decided that she would see an aurist the next morning.

"Are you going to be good enough to give my niece a turn?" she asked. "Monsieur Belfort, my dear."

Monsieur Belfort brought his heels together, and made a profound bow, which he followed up by presenting his bent arm without a word. Diane took it. He was a beginning, she reflected; if the rest saw her dancing, they would ask to be introduced at once. But alas for her hopes! Monsieur Belfort was the beginning, likewise the end. He danced with her three times, and she was obliged to confess that he was a good partner, in spite of his heavy breathing, which sounded like a little steam-tug letting off steam. He also took them in to supper, Diane following rebelliously in the rear of him and her aunt. He also put them into their carriage after the long, disappointing evening had worn itself away, and murmured something to aunt Amélie, before closing the door, that made her beam with satisfaction.

"Well, my dear, has the ball been amusing?" she asked, settling back into her corner.

"Detestable," said Diane concisely.

Aunt Amélie sat upright; this language in the little pawn surprised and disturbed her.

"Didn't you like Monsieur Belfort?" she asked, with a trifle of asperity in her voice.

"The old gentleman who danced with me, you mean?"

"He 's not very old; your father was his age when he married."

"Well, he seems as old as a man can be, and still live," retorted Diane mutinously.

"He 's an extremely nice fellow" —

"Fellow," put in Diane, in a scornful aside.

"A large wine merchant from Bordeaux, a widower with most honorable connections. He is pleased with you, and is coming to-morrow to ask your papa's permission to marry you. It is an excellent chance, and you should jump at it for many reasons."

"Monsieur Belfort may go back to his wine and his respectable connections," said Diane, with a decided ring in her voice, new to her aunt. "I am a Beaulieu, and we don't marry tradesmen."

Aunt Amélie raised her shoulders in her dark corner, but made no reply. She was a woman of shrewd discernment, and did not feel displeased with her niece for proving a difficult subject; it made the game more amusing. But she determined to win in the end, and to that purpose set herself to study Diane's nature with patient care. Had Monsieur Belfort proved unsusceptible to the girl's charms, she had intended giving her a pretty

outfit to draw him on. As things were, however, she decided to let Diane feel all the discomfort of being inadequately dressed, so that she should value the power of money to the uttermost. And so it happened that Diane found her visions of Paris joys fading day by day, until she could scarcely remember what they had been.

One disillusion followed another; the parties, to which her aunt took her night after night, were all dull repetitions of the first. Now and then a bold youth, attracted by her fresh prettiness, would ask her to dance, but the world is sadly commercial, and she always knew that her rare partners were destined to marry girls whose names and fortunes equaled their own, or to raise some enormously rich *bourgeoise* to the giddy height of a title in exchange for her papa's money. How she hated the life! The dull afternoon calls, where she was expected to sit mute in a corner, while her elders said the same things over and over; the lack of fresh air and exercise; the constant feeling that she was an outsider, and that only the want of a well-filled purse prevented her from being the match of any of the gay married belles, of whom she caught infrequent glimpses.

Aunt Amélie had no idea that she was interfering with anything so important as Providence as she began systematically to mould Diane's character, and to break her spirit. She thought honestly that she was working hard for the child's good, and laid down her head every night on her

pillow with a glow of gratification at the progress made during the day. More than once she regretted that Diane had been brought up at home. There is nothing so satisfactory as the numbing influence exerted by convent discipline; if a young girl has no marked vocation for a religious life, she is so thankful to escape from the deadly monotony that she jumps at the first mention of a husband; to her marriage means freedom, and not until later does she realize that she has exchanged one sort of jailer for another; the dress varies, but the system is not dissimilar.

So aunt Amélie, being far advanced in the keen study of young girls' whims, easily discovered Diane's weak points. She saw that she loved luxury; consequently the good lady's provision and fuel bills shrunk in a manner most gratifying to herself, but disconcerting to her cook, who touched a sou for every franc paid to the tradespeople. She saw that Diane chafed at the calm and innocent amusements to be found with girls of her own age, and for that reason the poor little pawn was moved about from one tame affair to another; nice morning classes where some elderly person read aloud an instructive article; afternoon concerts, where the pupils of an irreproachable school murdered music, to the accompaniment of rows of smiling and applauding relations and friends. In order to emphasize her treatment, the good aunt now and then allowed a glimpse at the great, real world, where excitement and amusement stalked about in broad day.

Those brief side views of the greater world fascinated Diane. There was gayety and amusement for you! That was the life she felt herself fitted for. But it seemed as impossible to enter its magic circle here as when she had fancied it all by the fireside in the old château. Nor did she wish to go home. When her father asked her, with a wistful look, if she would soon be ready to go back, she always shook her head, and said, with an air of false cheerfulness: "Oh no, papa dear! This is my good moment; you must let me have all the fun of it."

So the old marquis would pat the blonde head gently, and resign himself to more of the intolerable existence. He never spoke of his yearning to go back to his country life; who would have understood it? So he tried to content himself by thinking that his little girl was enjoying herself, and would stand for hours at his window, looking across the dull, narrow street whose one recommendation was its aristocratic neighborhood, trying to see the direction of the wind by the chimney-pots on the houses opposite. It was a small pleasure, but took his mind to Touraine; for he could judge whether the day were good for hunting by its quarter; he could picture the touch of the ground beneath the horses' hoofs: if it came from the west that meant rain or mist, with soft roads; if the north wind blew, that told him that it would be a bad morning; and so on. He went to his club, but he found that his ideas were far behind those

of his contemporaries, and he longed for the very evenings, the thought of which made Diane shiver, when they were alone together; or even for the Sunday dinner, always shared with the curé, according to a long-established family habit. Never before had he realized the negative selfishness of his life, and he determined to make full expiation.

One rainy afternoon he was in the dismal, dingy drawing-room with his sister and daughter; he had his newspaper, aunt Amélie was making a hideous church decoration, and Diane was standing at a window, playing little tunes on the panes with her fingers. She was utterly bored, and wondered what she could say to provoke a ripple of excitement in the quiet room. Suddenly she turned, and took up a corner of her aunt's work.

"It 's really indecent to do such things as that; the colors are so primitive they make one blush," she said tentatively.

"Diane, I must request you to choose more lady-like expressions," said the older lady, twitching the embroidery away. "At times you hardly speak as a well-brought-up young girl should."

"That kind of girl is quite out of fashion now; you never give me a chance to make my mark, my aunt."

"I give you the same chance other girls have, but you turn your back on yours. Think of the marriages that have been arranged since you came to Paris. The last is that of Berthe de Salbris;

her mother is marrying her very well, I was told this morning."

"Is she that red-faced girl who 's so rich?"

"Berthe is a good girl, and a pretty one, too. Louis," appealed aunt Amélie to her brother, "you remember Mademoiselle de Salbris? She is pretty, is n't she?"

"Charming; a lovely young creature," replied the courtly old gentleman with emphasis, as he laid down his paper with patient politeness. It was a part of his creed that all women were charming, or at any rate that they should be spoken of as if they were.

"She is *not* lovely," said Diane decidedly. "Her face is blotchy, her nose is round, and her feet are hideous. It is nothing but her fortune that makes people say nice things about her. It is nothing but money, money, money in this vulgar old Paris! Without it one might be as beautiful as a Venus, and not even a shoeblack would take the trouble to look at you."

Aunt Amélie held her work up as if examining it, but her real motive was to hide a smile that turned up the corners of her shrewd old lips. The game was growing more interesting; the first moves had been slow in producing results, but they were sure.

Monsieur de Beaulieu disliked Diane's vehemence, and, too kind-hearted to reprove her openly, frowned as he began to read again.

"I don't object to hearing other women praised

when they deserve it," Diane went on, more to herself than to the others. "There is one beauty I've seen at the Palais de Glace, and I was as ready to call her lovely as all the rest who crowded round her. You remember her, papa; that lady you asked to be introduced to the other day, when you were with me, Madame de Lussac."

"Oh, certainly I recall her. A very exquisite creature, with delight— Are you ill, Amélie? What is it?"

No wonder he asked, for his worthy sister had contorted her face into such an unintelligible expression that he might be forgiven for thinking her in pain.

"No, no! Diane, dear, run to my room, and get my other eye-glasses for me."

"Here they are, my aunt," said Diane, with a wicked little smile, seeing through the effort to get her away.

"Thank you," said aunt Amélie crossly, taking the too prominent glasses with rather a vicious grab as Diane held them out to her. The girl was very exasperating at times!

There was silence for some moments after this. Then, apparently apropos of nothing at all, aunt Amélie said: —

"We are going some day next week to breakfast with Baron Ernst."

"Ernst? Have I met him? He sounds like a Jew," said Diane carelessly.

"His father was of German extraction, I be-

lieve," said aunt Amélie evasively. "He is very rich and musical; his hôtel is one of the most elegant in Paris."

Yes, decidedly the game was interesting. Here came the grand *coup* to which all those apparently insignificant moves had been leading.

CHAPTER III

Although his nose was rather mongrel than typical in shape (a fact which gave him untold satisfaction), there was no doubt that Baron Félix Ernst was a Jew. Born in France, near Paris, in which city his worthy father had driven a thriving trade, Félix had spent all his life within easy access of the Bourse. His mother had died when he was a child, and old Ernst lavishly poured out his love upon the only surviving member of his family. He spoiled the boy, effacing himself in every way; gave him an expensive education, gratified his every whim, and completed the devotion of a lifetime by dying just as Félix had begun to regard him as a possible hindrance in the career that he had planned for himself.

At twenty-five the young man found himself alone in the world, the undisputed master of an immense fortune, so placed, that, being extremely clever concerning business matters, in less than three years he had doubled the sum left him by his father. He was well known, among a certain set in Paris who frequent the Bourse, for his carefully balanced policy, a mixture of caution and boldness. There was a never ending discussion as to how rich he really was, but he was far too keen to

let any one look over his cards, and the uncertainty about him increased the rumors of his enormous wealth which advertised him. He had one ungratified ambition: to enter that world of which he read with a fascinated envy in the society papers, where every one seemed to be a nobleman, the mere echo of whose doings sounded in his ears like the music of sirens. He swore to himself that he would find the golden key that was sure to open the gates of this paradise before he died, and he set about the task with praiseworthy diplomacy.

He soon became known as one of the most open-handed, generous fellows in the world. He never refused to lend money to some half-ruined scion of a noble family; he seemed to hate being repaid; he was a devilish good-natured creature, too, and he sang almost as well as any tenor at the opera. But if there had been any observer behind the scenes it would have been noted that never a franc went out of Félix's pocket unless he received its equivalent in some form. It was by buying one young scapegrace that he became a member of a fairly aristocratic club. This was a decided step in advance; but although the men whom he met there were very cordial to him, accepted his invitations, drank his wine, won his money at cards, and criticised his horses, he noticed that they never introduced him to their wives or mothers, and he had never placed his foot inside one of their houses.

These rebuffs merely made him the more determined to win, and in France the franc is even

mightier than the transatlantic dollar, only it must be used with infinite tact in every case except the buying of a wife; then it is generally accepted frankly as the chief standard of value. So Félix brought all his strong, cunning ability to bear on the problem before him, and studied it minutely. When he considered the time ripe for the step, he became a convert to the Roman Catholic Church, and himself superintended the insertion of the news in several of the leading papers, the fact delicately announced, his identity thinly veiled under his initials. When the noise caused by this move had begun to die away, he took a journey to Rome with a letter of introduction to a leading cardinal. He left behind him a munificent sum in the Holy City, but he brought away a title of baron. Here, too, had he shown his usual shrewdness, for, as a rule, no title lower than a count's is sold. But he knew that the quieter the title the less unfriendly the remarks made against it, so by paying out of all proportion he had his way. With a confident feeling that at last he had struck the right trail he bought a pretty hôtel in the new and fashionable quarter of Paris, and furnished it regally. Thoroughly artistic, he overdid nothing; his salons were not in the least gaudy; the tiny coronets that suddenly blossomed out on his harnesses, on his silver and table-linen, on his gold-mounted dressing articles, were very tiny indeed, and could not have roused envy or amusement in the meanest spirit. All this was not lost among his pleasure-

seeking, money-loving acquaintances. He began to receive invitations to small and select parties, and large and gorgeous dinners. Still he had not arrived at that little intimacy for which his very soul yearned, and he saw that he must gain it by means of a marriage. The higher he stepped socially, the more lofty became his ambition, and he cast his eyes about him to find a suitable wife. He did not require a fortune, but high aristocratic connections. Before long his fancy was caught by what he had heard of little Mademoiselle de Beaulieu; the name alone was a tempting bait; but she was guarded by a gorgon of an aunt, and could only be seen within the sacred precincts of the frigid Faubourg Saint-Germain. But one of his smart friends had a right to go and come as he pleased there. So to the mother of this friend he ventured to send a donation for a charity in which she was deeply interested. The letter accompanying the gift was so humble, and the offering so princely, that the ancient dame consented to have her son bring the baron to one of her evenings. This weekly function had on the world at large a funereal effect, owing to the glacial atmosphere, both mental and physical, of her dimly lighted apartment, and the lack of all material sustenance; but Félix felt himself at last on Parnassus. The air might be too rarefied to breathe with ease, and the gods themselves a trifle heavy, but that mattered little to him. The hostess was good enough to question him minutely about his affairs, to ask

his advice regarding some South American shares she held, and crowned her affability by telling him that it was a shame he did not marry. This gave him the opening for which he had prayed; he responded with suitable meekness, hinting that if she took an interest in the matter she would find him as pliable as wax beneath her touch, and then in the following conversation he adroitly allowed her to think that Diane's name had been her own suggestion. She was on intimate terms with aunt Amélie, and it was through her agency that Diane found herself ushered into the sumptuous antechamber of the baron's hôtel one morning in February.

She had not taken two steps before the caressing influence of luxury had gently wrapped itself about her. The quiet, well-dressed, well-trained servants who showed her and her aunt through a suite of beautiful rooms, the touch of her foot on the Indian carpets, the pervading odor of violets, all appealed to her, and filled her with a sense of well-being. Félix greeted his guests with grave courtesy, but Diane hardly noticed him, so absorbed was she in his surroundings. The walls were hung with an old damask whose tones were modulated by time, and against this background a few very good paintings showed to advantage; a piano stood open in one corner; a wood fire burned in a wonderfully carved chimney, and mingled its pungent eastern odor with the fragrance of the violets massed everywhere about the room. She noticed that there

were no other young girls present, and was vaguely pleased, for she did not care for them; some half-savage instinct made her always treat them as foes. At breakfast her pleasure-loving soul expanded in the congenial atmosphere, and although she was far too well taught to talk much among her elders, she enjoyed every moment. Her little hand caressed the sheeny fabric of the large napkin on her knees; she knew how fine it was, how costly, and she liked to stroke it as a sign of wealth. She was pleased that the flowers on the table were orchids, and she noted with observant eyes the delicacy of the Venetian glass, the rarity of the porcelain, and the weight of the forks, each one with its demure little coronet carved on it. She could not have told afterwards what was said at the meal, but it seemed short to her. She would have liked to sit there all day, tasting now and then the dainty dishes set before her, and sipping the wine that she knew was as costly as molten gold.

Afterwards, in the salon, she leaned back in her chair with a sensation of having found her niche; delicious, physical comfort spread through her. She would have asked nothing better than to feel and breathe, but an added touch of pleasure came when the baron, gracefully acceding to the request of his guests for some music, sat down before the piano, and, having touched the keys with velvet fingers, sang to them. He showed great judgment in his choice of songs; beginning with the severely classical, he glided into the sentimental, but as the

words were German, no one was shocked. Some of the assembled company kept up a murmured conversation under cover of the music, aunt Amélie and her charitable friend being intensely absorbed, with their heads close together.

But Diane listened as in a dream; the rich full tones of Félix's voice intoxicated her; the melody made her head swim; it seemed to embrace her with passionate warmth as it welled forth, now filling the room with its volume, now modulated to almost a whisper, but a whisper full of meaning, and for her, for her!

She was still in a dream when there was a movement; the old ladies rose and shook out their plumage like waterfowl, and Diane heard her aunt say: —

"May I ask your servant to call a cab for me? I had intended to walk home, but I see it is raining."

"My carriage is all ready, waiting outside. Will you make me happy by using it?" was the answer. Aunt Amélie bowed graciously, and having made the proper speech swam out of the room, followed by Diane.

The butler himself put them into the carriage, pushing aside the waiting footman to do so, and the soft comfort of the dainty brougham, the rapid gait of the big bay horse, all was to Diane but the continuance of her delight.

"A very agreeable young man, and not at all ill-looking," was the comment of the elder lady.

"I don't think that I saw him, but I adored his house," said Diane. Then after a pause she went on: "I wonder why it is that one gets so quickly accustomed to nice things? I can never adjust myself to those filthy cabs, but in ten minutes I feel as if I had always had a carriage like this."

Aunt Amélie made no reply, but she smiled her shrewd, well-pleased little smile, and began to think of the trousseau.

Félix stood looking after his guests as they were whirled off behind his horse, and his hand trembled with excitement. His chance had come. He never would have been content to marry an ugly girl, he was too much the slave of beauty; but this little maiden was delicious, with her sea-green eyes, her supple figure, and her clear skin. He turned to a long mirror in the room, and scanned himself with new interest. As aunt Amélie had said, he was not ill-looking; a trifle too portly perhaps for his height and age, and his color told a tale of too many rich things for a daily diet. "But I 'm damned if the Jew shows," he reflected. It did n't, and it did. There was but an imperceptible lisp in his speech, of which he was unconscious, and his nose might have sprung into being in an East Indian zenana, or a North American wigwam, so utterly wanting was it in racial saliency; but the prominent eyes set too far apart, with their heavy white lids, told a tale that was confirmed by the thick hands and cushioned fingertips. His hair was rather light than dark, and the

sweeping mustache which covered his glistening lips was reddish. No, not "ill-looking," but one the mere sight of whom called to the imagination hints of jewels and velvet collars, although Ernst was too wise ever to indulge in the finery after which his soul yearned.

Business matters, such as marriages, are rapidly settled in France, and before March blew its windy self into evidence, Félix, Baron Ernst, was the accepted fiancé of the last of the Beaulieu family.

His munificence regarding the settlements roused aunt Amélie's ardent enthusiasm. So sincerely touched was she by his generosity that she forgot to tell the marquis that it was all owing to her management. The baron was to settle on Diane a sum exactly the double of the assessed value of the Beaulieu château with its wide-spreading acres, and in return he was to take possession of the property. The marquis was to retain his wing in the old pile, and live there all the rest of his days.

Before signing, however, Ernst wished to look over the property; he was not a man to buy a pig in a poke he told himself, and it was arranged that he and his future father-in-law should run down to the place in the morning train, spend the day examining the land, and Ernst could catch the midnight back, in this way taking but one day from his more important affairs. It was characteristic of the man's system of life that the evening before the planned expedition he dined at one of the largest hôtels in Paris, where the wine is deserv-

edly famous. Having ordered a double portion, he sent his compliments to the agent for the purchase of wines, whom he knew to be in the hôtel at the time, and invited him to dine. The man accepted readily, and as the dinner progressed Ernst asked question after question about the wines in Touraine. The agent, thinking that the rich Jew was going to make some large purchase, talked of his occupation with sense and judgment; it was a subject he knew well, and men are apt to speak clearly when they are on their own ground.

"Who makes the best wine in Touraine?" asked Félix. A name and address were given, and noted down by the questioner, after which he bid his guest good-night, and on his homeward way stopped at a book-shop where he bought a scientific work on the growth of vines. In this book he read until his lamp began to burn dimly, and the sound of market wagons in the street warned him that he had but few hours to sleep before his valet waked him for the early train. However much Ernst loved ease and luxury, he never allowed his tastes to interfere with his interests. On the journey down there was little conversation between the two men. Monsieur de Beaulieu's drooping, melancholy eyes were fixed on the landscape by which they glided, but he saw nothing; he was thinking that he was on his way to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage; it was for Diane's sake, however, and if she were happy nothing else mattered. Ernst had a map of the district about Amboise,

and was studying it intently. He found the property of the wine-grower whose address he had in his note-book, and saw with satisfaction that it was very near Beaulieu.

The old-fashioned carriage was awaiting them at the station, and the coachman's face was one broad grin of delight at seeing his master.

"All well at Beaulieu?" asked the marquis.

"Yes, monsieur le marquis, and all the better for the thought of seeing monsieur."

"My hunter?"

"Superb! And, monsieur le marquis, the brindled cow has calved, and the butcher from Amboise offers to buy the calf for a fair price."

"Ah? Well, we 'll see, we 'll see."

"And the sabot-maker wants to know if monsieur le marquis would sell him the two walnuts bordering the farm road; they are very old, and I"—

"All that must wait, my friend," said Monsieur de Beaulieu, thinking that the right of disposing of his timber was gone with all the rest.

He had his head out of the carriage window as they drove along, receiving the peasants' greetings with a gracious smile. As a rule, he had noticed the lower classes but little, not from any hardness, simply because his old-time conservatism saw in them a grade of beings not far removed from the beasts that perish. To-day, however, a wave of love for everything, animate or inanimate, that belonged in the remotest way to Beaulieu, swept over him.

He strained his eyes to catch the first glimpse of the château towers, as they rose above the tops of the trees. A dim violet mist seemed to hang over the leafless branches, each full of countless, swelling buds; a thin spiral of pale blue smoke rose in the still air.

"They have a fire in the dining-room for us; that is well," said the marquis half aloud.

He felt as if he were coming home to more than mere tangible surroundings; the place was full of memories, which had made a large part of his life for so many years that they were more real than the realities. Not a tree bordering the avenue along which the old carriage rumbled but had its roots interlaced in his heart; not a hollow on the old stone steps but spoke to him of the former generations, which had gone in and out of the old home until the inevitable day when they passed out for the last time, leaving no trace. Ah, well, it would be selfish of him to allow a feeling of sentimental affection to interfere with Diane's future; he must banish the idea of treachery to the dead by setting his mind resolutely on unselfish plans for the living. But his whole being quivered, and an uncharacteristic expression of haughtiness came into his face as Félix entered the hall with a businesslike air, and threw an inquiring glance about him.

"Fifteenth century?" he said, stooping to gaze up the throat of the stone fireplace. "I hope the chimney draws; this is a big place to warm."

"This part is fifteenth century; the keep, on the other side, is older, as you can tell by its square form. The chimney has drawn well enough for many centuries; I fancy it will not fail now," said the marquis, answering both remarks at once.

"That 's all right, then; the hall 's not bad. The stone flags are a bit rickety, and should be renewed; but I expect to have a lot to repair."

"Will you breakfast now, monsieur?" asked the marquis, feeling his right in the place fading, and he himself growing a faint form.

"Thanks, yes; traveling 's hungry work, and I must step round before dark."

The table had been drawn up near the blazing fire at one end of the large dining-room, and a screen shut off the distance, and kept out the drafts. A simple breakfast was served flanked with a bottle of wine made from the vines on the place. Félix tasted it, and then said: —

"We 'll have some good wine this time three years if I 'm not mistaken. The vines need renewing, and you should never have let them run down. How about caves for keeping it after making?"

Then followed a long talk, full of technicalities, about southern exposures, American grafts, proper temperature for ripening the wine when made, and a hundred details, which interested the marquis in spite of himself, and brought them to the cup of black coffee without any friction.

Félix set down his empty cup, and stood lighting his cigar, his legs well apart, on the hearth-rug.

"I 've decided to look at the outside first," he said between his puffs; "the inside can be seen by lamplight. Will you come with me?"

"As you like."

"Well, just give me a start with your foreman, so that I can let him see I have your confidence, if you please."

Monsieur de Beaulieu bowed, and the three men set out on their tour of inspection. Félix surprised the other two by his accurate knowledge of the theories of grape-raising and his keen observation. He took from his pocket a small magnifying-glass, and every now and then broke off a bit of the wood from the leafless vines, and examined it carefully. They had gone through the park behind the château at first, where the flat lands spread away towards the west; then they returned, making a détour, to look at the sloping ground, with a southern exposure, where the best grapes grew. As they emerged from the trees they stood on a plateau commanding a wide view of the valley of the Loire. The willows in the lowlands beneath their feet burned in their orange livery, and touches of red, as vivid in spring as in autumn, showed that Dame Nature was stirring from her winter rest; for the dear old mother does not sleep in Touraine; she only sits still awhile, her hands folded placidly, allowing the grateful soil to garner fresh force before she inspires it to fresh exertion.

"Hullo, what 's that?" asked Félix, pointing to a small, octagon building set on the level space.

"That is a pavilion, built by the Beaulieu in the time of Louis XIV. It is a pretty place from which to see the sunset, and a favorite spot of my daughter's."

Félix eyed it critically, deciding mentally that it should be improved inside and out, to suit his bride, and then asked how to reach the estate of the famous wine-maker, whose name was in his note-book. He was told that it lay not a mile to the west, and a path to it was pointed out to him by his intended father-in-law, who showed none of the surprise he felt at seeing the brisk Jew set out alone, promising to be back in full time for dinner.

The foreman looked once or twice at his master, half hoping for a word of explanation, but the old nobleman stood silent, his chin resting on his breast, and his melancholy eyes fixed on the ground; so the man touched his cap, and walked away, wondering if the place were to be sold.

For a long time the marquis stood still, while the spring wind swept through the trees, whispering of hope and promise, as it never does in any other season; for the winter wind storms and rages, the summer wind flatters and coquets, and an autumn wind threatens. Then he drew a deep sigh, and went slowly down the path to the stables. He laid his hand once on the trunk of an old oak, and looked up at its brown leaves waiting for the new shoots to push them off, with a feeling that perhaps they understood. The tree had been a

trysting-place in his youth; there were tender, gently remorseful memories floating about it, memories not connected with the last Marquise de Beaulieu. It was many a long year since they had been present to him, and he patted the rough bark as he stood there. Then he resumed his way, and his sore heart warmed a little as he heard the delighted neigh of his old hunter in answer to his voice. How long he stood in the dim stall patting the faithful creature's head he did not know, but it was twilight when he left him, and saw, stepping smartly along the avenue, Ernst.

They went in to dinner together, the older man still very silent, the younger absorbed in mental calculations. When the servant had left them alone, Félix turned his chair so as to get the full benefit of the fire, and said: —

"I have secured the services of your neighbor's foreman."

"How did you manage that?" asked Monsieur de Beaulieu in some surprise.

"Easily enough; I offered him more than his master could possibly pay. It is not money thrown away, because he is a very clever man, and I am a mere tyro regarding vine-growing ; but when I have learnt all I need, I shall offer him regular wages again, and if he won't accept them, why, I shall be independent of him, and he can go."

The old nobleman's eyes flashed in the firelight as he said very quietly: —

"I do not understand the new ways; in my day

that was not the manner in which gentlemen behaved."

"No?" said Félix easily. "Well, money is harder to come by nowadays, and we must look sharper; that 's all. Now, shall we begin our examination inside the ark? My time is short, you know."

Without a word the marquis rose, and took a lamp himself from the table; he shrank from calling a servant to carry it; he would have no one see his trial. He had decided not to let any weakness interfere with the businesslike progress through the house, and to visit each room in turn; but as they proceeded, old memories, long hidden away in secret recesses of his brain, sprang into startling distinctness. It was behind these long curtains that he and his sister used to hide from each other in their games of hide-and-seek. The Jew was feeling of the texture, and uttered an impatient exclamation on perceiving a long rent, neatly mended, in one of them, and the old gentleman recalled the rainy day, and the mad romp with a dog whose presence in the château was sternly forbidden, and the horror with which he and the then little Amélie heard the terrible crack as poor Fidèle worried the unfortunate brocade. She had been obliged to mend it with fast falling tears dropping on her work, while the boy's punishment had been to learn by heart a celebrated passage from Telemachus, which he had hated ever since. In the library the stone fireplace recalled the long,

sad, cold day when he sat huddled by the corner, trying to look at pictures in a book on his knee, but unable to fix his attention on them; for every sound that reached his ear spoke to him of a vague horror; he knew that in the room overhead his father lay dying. Félix peered up this chimney as he had before in the hall, and, obeying a gesture from him, the marquis went on with his dolorous journey. In his mind he likened every stopping place to a station on the road to the cross. He evaded the picture-gallery on the ground floor, hoping that these alien eyes might not rest on his ancestors' revered faces this night, and they went up one of the winding staircases in a tower, Félix stamping on each step to see if it were solid, and rapping on the wall at intervals to discover any hidden chamber. Bedroom after bedroom was entered; the chairs were bounced on, to test their springs, by the businesslike purchaser, the bed springs were tested, the tapestries in the state apartment were felt of between an auctioneer's thumb and finger, and the extravagance that had neglected them until repairing had become a serious matter was blamed severely. Door after door was opened; nothing was sacred from the Jew's impertinent gaze. The place where the marquis had first seen his child, her cradle, her girlish belongings, all came beneath his appraising touch. Monsieur de Beaulieu had resolved to pass by in silence the room of all others the most precious to him, his mother's, but he lacked the necessary

force to stop Félix, who pushed open the door, and entered. It was furnished in the hideous taste which was fashionable in the early thirties when she had come there as a bride, and the nest which was to receive her had been arranged according to her ideas of the beautiful. Heavy, ungainly mahogany tables, wardrobes, and chairs darkened the place, already made sombre by the dull blue and gray damask hangings which fell before the windows and about the bed where the marquis had last seen the adored face set in the peaceful rigidity of death. By the fireplace, with a solid work-table by its side, was a large chair, with a high back and projecting wings, not lovely to look upon, but very comfortable to rest a head against. In this chair his mother had sat when he had come to her on the eve of his first communion, and from the table drawer she had taken the gifts for the occasion, — a beautifully bound missal, a rosary, and some other trifles. He recalled, too, a serious illness he had had when young, and remembered how she had placed him in her bed, and had tended him with a devotion passionate in its strength. One night he had waked and thought himself alone; he had merely turned his head, and she had risen from the shadow of the old chair, before which she had been praying, and came to him with soothing drinks and gentle words. How long ago was it? Yesterday? And who was this old man holding a lamp with a shaking hand, and this vulgar Jew who had seated himself in the chair, and was testing its springs?

Félix stretched out his hand, and was about to pull open the table drawer when the marquis stopped him.

"Kindly leave that alone; it belonged to the late Marquise de Beaulieu."

Ernst jumped up, his kinder feelings touched.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "You should have told me that this was your wife's room; it was not necessary to take me here."

"Not my wife's — my mother's," said the old nobleman, lowering his voice as if speaking a holy word, as indeed it is.

His wife, the last marquise, had slipped from his mind; she was but the link necessary to connect two generations of Beaulieus, nothing more. And in thus regarding her, the marquis was not peculiar among his countrymen.

They turned away in silence, the marquis trusting that the hour was too late to allow a visit to the picture-gallery, but Félix, looking at his watch, announced that if they were brisk he could give half an hour more. When they entered the long room lined with portraits, he took the lamp from the other's hand, and began a systematic examination, now and then uttering exclamations of delight.

"That looks like a Greuze," he said, stopping before a fresh, charming head, with a suggestion of Diane peeping out of the eyes.

"It is."

"And that — by Jove! That 's a genuine

Clouet, or I know nothing about pictures! Do you know how valuable that is?"

"It is a Clouet, and was painted by the express command of His Majesty Henri II., who was fond of my ancestor, and delighted to show him honor."

It was the first boast that had fallen from the old nobleman's lips, and it seemed to impress the baron, whose remarks during the short time that they remained together were of a more humble, or perhaps less arrogant nature. He wondered once or twice on his lonely night journey why the old cock had n't sold one or two of his undoubted gems if he were as hard up as his surroundings signified; but Félix had lived too much in the world to be profoundly surprised at any idiosyncrasies of his fellow mortals.

CHAPTER IV

Diane had barely time to eat and sleep. Aunt Amélie, able now to be generous, according to her real nature, determined that the wedding outfit should be her gift, and from morning until night the days were spent in running from tailor to dressmaker, from dressmaker to milliner, from milliner to seamstress. Diane could not believe that all these exquisite things were for her; she danced with joy at each new acquisition, and was as happy as she could be, when she did not stop to think.

She never saw Félix alone, and, as he was much occupied on his side, his visits were short and rare. If by chance he had an hour to spare, something much dreaded by aunt Amélie, there was always his singing to fall back on; and when she listened to his full voice, Diane came near having a personal feeling for its owner.

But nature is stronger than heredity, than custom, than authority; and it came about one day that Diane's nature spoke.

The occasion was on the arrival of the bridegroom's wedding present, which consisted of various articles, determined by long usage. The contract was to be signed the next day, and when Diane and her aunt entered the apartment toward

evening, worn and tired by the many last duties to be attended to, they were greeted by the important news that the *corbeille* had arrived. Diane flew to her room, and there stood a beautiful antique Florentine chest. The smiling maid handed her an envelope in which was the key, and she opened the lid that hid the treasure.

Within were rich furs, filmy lace of fabulous price, cases containing jewels fit for an empress, pieces of silk and velvet for dresses, in short, all that could be imagined by the most active brain as pleasing to a woman's fancy.

Diane and her aunt handled first one and then another gift, exclaiming with joy.

"Here is something that I've not opened. Let's see!" As she spoke Diane unclasped a morocco case, in which were set an elaborate card-case and a purse of the same workmanship.

"How pretty! What good taste!" exclaimed aunt Amélie. "Come to meet your father; I hear him at the door."

She hastened out as she spoke, leaving Diane with the purse in her hand. It was heavy, and as she weighed it, some thought seemed to trouble her, for she scowled. Then, hesitating a little, she peeped in; it was filled with bright, new louis. With a cry of rage she threw it from her.

"The low brute! How dared he? How dare he offer me money?" she gasped, and dashed to the drawing-room, where she heard the murmur of voices.

Without waiting a moment she broke in on her father and aunt with, "Papa, you may send word to Monsieur le Baron Ernst that I shall not marry him. He may send for his presents, and save them for some other girl; I shall never touch them!"

The two elders stared with amazement. At last aunt Amélie found her voice.

"What do you mean, my child? Is this a pleasantry? Explain at once."

"No, my aunt, it is dead earnest. I thought it would be so easy — but, but I did n't know. Oh, I can't take money from him. I can't! It seems like an insult."

"What do you mean, little girl? Money? What is she talking about?" asked the poor, bewildered marquis.

"Yes; he dared to send me gold pieces in the purse, and it is an insult!"

Aunt Amélie burst into a relieved laugh.

"You silly, silly child. That is only what all bridegrooms put into the wedding purse. You can't mean that you are offended at that? Why, your cousins complained that their purses were too light."

"Oh, if you don't see what I mean, I can't explain; but I won't marry him, I won't, I won't!" stormed Diane, bursting into angry tears.

Aunt Amélie pointed to the door authoritatively as her brother looked helplessly at her.

"The poor little thing is all tired out; do you

leave her with me; I 'll make all right," she said soothingly. And the marquis, glad to escape a scene, hurried away. After the door had closed behind him there was silence for a few moments, only broken by Diane's sobs. When they had subsided a little she began to speak.

"My aunt, I don't want to marry him," she broke out.

"Because he has given you a magnificent *corbeille?*"

There was a ring of sarcasm in the question.

"No, not that exactly. But when I saw that money, I thought that it was a price, — that I was being bought, and I can't, oh, I can't marry him! Don't make me, don't, don't!"

"Diane, stop this moment. You are getting hysterical, and you will look a fright to-morrow. I am not pleased with you."

"But, my aunt, my dear, dear aunt" —

Diane had flung herself on the floor, and had grasped her aunt's skirt. The older woman gently pulled it away, and raised her niece to a more correct position.

"Now, be calm, and we 'll talk sensibly. You can never gain your point by behaving like a fool. You must" —

At this moment the butler threw open the door and announced: —

"Monsieur le baron."

Félix, gratified by the servant's treating him as one of the family, advanced with a satisfied smile,

but stopped halfway across the room, arrested by the signs of agitation on the faces before him.

Diane rose at once, determined to lose no time.

"Monsieur, you have come in time to hear me say that I regret very much, but I cannot marry you, and will not be driven into it!"

"Diane, be quiet; I will arrange this matter." Aunt Amélie spoke with authority, and then turned to Ernst. "My dear Félix, Diane is tired and over-excited. The sight of so much splendor has overcome her; the dear child thinks herself unworthy of so much munificence. You must remember that scarcely another girl in Paris has ever received such a superb *corbeille*, and if you will leave us for a while she will become calmer."

She smiled tenderly as she spoke, and held out her hand. Félix, puzzled and annoyed, could do no less than press it to his lips, and accede to her request.

Once again alone, aunt Amélie, seeing that Diane had regained her self-control, spoke, and more to the point.

"You silly creature! How dare you play with your whole future? Are you working to be sent to a convent for the rest of your life?"

"Of course not!" retorted Diane sullenly.

"Do you want to go back to Beaulieu for the remainder of your days?"

"You know I don't; but"—

"Keep quiet, and pay attention to what I am going to say. It 's bad enough to be an old maid,

but a girl who allows matters to get to the point where she receives the *corbeille* on the eve of signing the contract, and then suddenly asserts that she has changed her mind, becomes utterly *déclassée*. I have tried not to be hard on you, my dear, but you must have seen yourself that it has not been easy to find you a husband, even with your name. Now, tell me this: if you tarnish that name by your own act, which is your only worldly possession of any value, what are you going to do?"

Diane said nothing. Her aunt continued: —

"I will tell you frankly, that if you persist in this foolish and inexplicable course, I can and will do no more for you. I am not rich, and your linen and clothes have been given you at a sacrifice. Unless you use them as the Baronne Ernst, I shall make some arrangement to have them taken back by the tradespeople, and give you up for good."

Diane's lip began to tremble. Aunt Amélie had been generous. How alone she, Diane, would be without her; and what a future! *Déclassée!*

The old woman of the world saw that her words had told, and changed her tone.

"Come, Diane; don't you see, darling, that I have done all from kindness, and from my devoted love for you and your papa?"

"Yes," said Diane a little remorsefully, thinking for the first time that she had received much and given little.

"Then, dear little Dianette, try also to believe me when I tell you that you are feeling what every

young girl does on the eve of marriage, and that it comes from being over-fatigued. It is mere nervousness, nothing more. Remember how hard we have both worked; I 'm almost dead myself."

"Poor auntie!"

"And poor papa, — and poor Félix, who is sincerely attached to you, sweet child. Why, you naughty girl, you should be ashamed for trying to undo all our happiness, and I ought to scold you, but I can make allowances, and I can sympathize. In two months you will be shivering to recall how near you came to losing your lucky chance. Now, may I go and tell those unfortunate men that her highness's caprices are over for the day?"

And Diane, turning her flashing ring, said, "Yes."

The next day the contract was signed, and the first Tuesday after Easter, Diane became Madame Ernst, one of the wealthiest women in Paris.

Marriage is almost always a decided turning-point in the lives of men and women; it exalts or degrades according to the character of the husband and wife. It promotes noble self-sacrifice or the reverse, as the two individualities work on each other. Ernst was not bad at heart; selfish and vulgar-minded if you will, but his life and training had taught him no other lesson. He had a warm sentiment for the ideal of home; a wife and children inspired in him much more holy feelings than the church of his adoption had ever roused. He was sincerely prepared to be a faithful, loving hus-

band to Diane, and the purest feelings of his life stirred within him as he knelt by her side before the altar. It had not occurred to him that he was taking any decided personality into his life; he thought of his wife as a sweet young creature, knowing nothing of the world, and one who would be content to be the light of his fireside. That he intended using her family name to push his fortunes in the great world, of which he felt himself at last a member, seemed only just. He had given her much, and in return he wanted its fair equivalent. His feet were high up on the ladder to success, and he saw the day in the near future when he would be known, first, as Baron Ernst de Beaulieu, and then, at the death of the marquis, he would relegate the name of his poor old father to that limbo where his discarded religion had disappeared, and be thenceforth distinguished as the Baron de Beaulieu.

But that he knew no more of Diane's character than she did of his was made evident at once. She had thought of him, when she had time to think of him at all during their brief engagement, as an inferior being, who would hold her in awe as the representative of a higher race, who would accept her word as his law, and who would lay his vast wealth at her feet in return for her condescension in becoming his wife.

Each argued from false premises. He had never suspected the haughty, almost savage pride of the little girl with her fair hair and mermaid's

eyes; she had never dreamed of man's nature as it is, and was, and ever shall be as long as man is. Mutual antipathy sprang into being at once, — revolt and disgust on her side, disappointment and wounded pride on his. All her ancestors gazed at him through her long lashes, and he writhed under the scorn that he felt lashing him like a thong.

But rebel against him and his low-bred instincts as much as she pleased, Diane was forced to acknowledge to herself that her husband was also her master. The power of the man who had known how to plot and wait to gain what he wanted was not to be turned to naught by the pride and spirit of a thousand Beaulieus, and in the larger affairs of life she found herself obliged to obey him, will she, nill she. His authority maddened her, and she began to take her revenge by inflicting on him petty wounds, such as were in her power, although she could not have known how they smarted.

We are so mercifully made that we grow used to almost everything, and, after the first angry struggle against her lot, Diane gradually accustomed herself to a hard, society view of life; at all events, she had now all the money and the attendant admiration for which her soul had longed. She threw herself into the extravagant, giddy rush of Parisian society, that part of it which is not represented by the oldest families or the best people. The second season after her marriage she became known as one of the most expensively dressed women of her set, and was followed by a

throng of flatterers who copied her clothes, her manners, and her style of conversation. She had the gratification of being mentioned as the one possible rival of the fascinating, irresistible Marquise de Lussac. And even to be named in the same breath with the marquise was a compliment, for she was a woman who held a unique position in the world. Everything was suspected of her, but nothing was known, and so potent were her tact and charm that she walked unsinged through the fiery furnace of scandal. There might be a few old "tabbies" like aunt Amélie who would not permit the mention of her name, but in her scheme of things they hardly counted. Her receptions were the most select imaginable; the smartest leaders of the fast set never failed to make their appearance in her apartment, and although they knew that the late marquis had left her very modestly provided for, they never betrayed the slightest surprise at the luxury of her surroundings. She could not have lived without pretty things about her, she used to say, lifting her appealing blue eyes to the person whom she was honoring with her confidence. In appearance she was a delicious blonde, not tall, but exquisitely proportioned, and with a skin like satin. She was never known to speak ill of any one, but her conversation was not rendered insipid in consequence, for she had a trick of saying the most shocking things with a little hesitation in her speech, and an air of candid innocence that seemed fitting for a Dresden china shepherdess. She

would keep a group of persons in convulsions of laughter, and after her naughtiest sally would open wide her great, dewy eyes, and say that she could not imagine what the joke was — she must have made some dreadful mistake — she was so stupid sometimes. She never neglected an opportunity of being agreeable to other women, and her charming, confidential air, "professional beauty" as she was, with a right to lord it over the less favored of her sex, won Diane's fancy. In vain did aunt Amélie advise, and scold, and even threaten to appeal to Ernst; Diane defied her, and took her first step from the world to which she naturally belonged when she went boldly to Madame de Lussac's receptions.

This pleased the marquise immensely, for she had had her prudent eye on the Ernst fortune for some time. Through her shallow friendship for Diane she contrived to know Félix. In two minutes she saw that there was a jar between the young couple; she kept her small, shell-like ears wide open, and heard the sweet bride make some very bitter remarks to her husband. So she pressed the intimacy.

One evening at the beginning of their acquaintance Diane entered her well-filled salon, fresh, exquisitely dressed, and triumphant in the knowledge of her beauty; two men were with her, both of them able to make or mar a woman's society success by a word or shrug.

"Where is the baron, dear child?" asked Madame de Lussac, holding her hand.

"I left him at home," returned Diane, with a touch of bravado. "I told him at dinner his manners were so bad that I had no further use for him, except to pay my bills."

"A fact, for I was there and heard her say it," said one of the men.

As she joined in the laugh that followed this audacious remark, the hostess said to herself, "Now is my good moment!"

The next time that she met Ernst she reproached him for having deserted her reception. She stopped her carriage beside the arcade in the Rue de Rivoli, and beckoned to him as he was walking along in true boulevard fashion.

"I counted on your singing," she said, with a world of tender rebuke conveyed in her glance. Félix flushed as he recalled the blind rage that he had felt that evening after Diane's insult.

"My absence was, unfortunately, unavoidable."

"Do you want me to forgive you, and ask you again?"

"That question has but one possible answer," he replied, his softer accents showing that already the charm had begun to work.

"Then get in and take a turn in the Bois with me," said Madame de Lussac, making room for him. Not another woman in Paris could have done such a thing and not suffered for it afterwards, but the little shepherdess was a privileged being. Needless to say that the flattered Félix obeyed.

To his surprise he found her far more approachable than his wife; he felt no inferiority in her soothing presence, and this was a sensation that he was never allowed to lose when with Diane. Before they had reached the arch Félix was indulging in a luxury that his money had never been able to give him, the luxury of a confidante. He found himself talking openly, with no feeling of embarrassment, about his past life, his ambitions, and the disappointment that followed his marriage.

"It was my money against her position, and, by the Lord, she has not played fair! She has the money, and I — what have I?"

Oh, what a relief it was to unburden his heart, and speak of his lack of family, to a woman who took it as a matter of course that there were infinite shades in the social world, and that the mere accident of being born below instead of above the salt made no difference in her eyes!

Odile spoke only once or twice, but she uttered little moans as if his tale hurt her tender heart, and when for a moment he was silent, she gently placed one of her hands on his clasped over the top of his cane. Such a delicate touch, but it thrilled all through him.

"How can I ever thank you for your sympathy?" he asked brokenly, as the carriage brought them near the street where he was to be left.

"That is all we poor women are good for, to give our sympathy where it is deserved; you men can do so much more for us than we can for you."

There was no doubt now in the mind of the marquise that this man was going to do a good deal for her in the near future.

If all the feminine world were composed of women of Odile de Lussac's type that despairing little French proverb never would have come into use: "Si jeunesse savait; si vieillesse pouvait." She had the power of youth and the knowledge of years.

From that day Ernst was her slave; there was no part of his nature that she did not study and appeal to. Her dainty, exquisite beauty stirred equally his artistic and physical instincts, and her unfailing tact soothed him, and made him submit to her rule without many protests. It was essential to her plans that their intimacy should not be suspected by the world, — not that there was anything wrong in it; oh dear, no! but a woman never can be too careful, as she often told him. Every now and then there came to him lucid intervals when he said bitterly to himself that his love ventures had done him very little good; for as time went on, and Diane became more firmly established in her position as a leader of fashion, she positively refused to be seen with him in public, and went her own way, undermining his hard won social standing by her attitude regarding him.

In spite of her emancipated attitude, however, no scandal attached itself to her, and no other name was ever mentioned in connection with hers. Society voted her as an amusing addition, but cold and without passion.

Thus Odile de Lussac became Ernst's one hope, and she led him on with consummate skill. The drive in her carriage was never repeated, and at times she seemed to have forgotten it. Yet when he was in the depths of despair there came a clasp from her hand, a whisper from her lips, a glance from her eyes to lure him on again.

It was a strange hunt, the hunted doubling so on her tracks as to seem at times the hunter.

Her object was to use him and his money without giving him any hold over her. His object was to gain that hold over her at any sacrifice of self or money; no price was too high in his eyes for the prize. Both were unscrupulous, wily, and determined; but the man was handicapped, because he loved the woman.

At last the position foreseen by Odile came; she began to feel the discomfort of an empty purse. Tradespeople, whose claims had been forgotten for years, sprung up like weeds, and brought in their little accounts as if they felt instinctively that she was hard pushed. In this crisis she permitted Félix to have one of his rare tête-à-têtes with her. It was not difficult for him to see that she was depressed; it was yet easier for her to tell him with well-simulated delicacy of her temporary embarrassments. She confessed that some shares, a little speculation, had turned the wrong way, and that this put her in a tight place, as she had counted on making a good thing out of them.

"I know a little about the inside of that deal;

will you transfer those shares to me? Will you trust me so far?" he asked, an idea flashing into his mind.

"I would trust you with anything but myself," she replied frankly.

The transfer was made, and when he told her a few days later that he had made a successful *coup*, by which she realized three times the original value of her stock, she showed gratitude and admiration, but no surprise.

"No wonder you stand so high in the financial world!" she exclaimed. "How proud I am of you! What a power you are!"

"With all but you," he answered sadly. "You don't give me a tenth part of the time you waste on other men. You treat me like a dog."

She rose, and placing her hands on his shoulders looked full into his eyes. "Félix," she said softly, and his name falling from her lips for the first time thrilled him, — "Félix, is there one who stands as close to me as you do? Is there one on whom I have allowed myself to be so dependent?"

"Sphinx, with your riddles," he retorted, but he smiled, and she blew far away the slight worry his restiveness had cost her. He continued to be her private broker, however, playing a game that might have been called, "Heads she wins; tails he loses." Keen-sighted with all the world besides, with her he was blind, and believed that she was ignorant of the fact that all her lucky gains came from his pocket. The thought of what she owed

him gave the Jew a sort of savage pleasure. When she flashed by him in her carriage, or shone on him from her opera-box, he would say to himself: "The furs about her are mine; I paid for them; I paid for the lace on her bosom, the jewel in her hair. All her luxuries come from me. I 'll own her yet!"

The lust of possession, the keynote of his character!

Love of money was hers, and she was so self-confident that she let him become the master of her financial affairs, trusting to her own skill to pull her out of any compromising situation.

But her game became more difficult daily, for she wished to gain all and give nothing. No endearments in private, no attentions in public, were allowed Félix. He was not the man to bear this state of things long, and one day she found her self-confidence rudely shaken. He had made a point of being her companion at some semi-public function, and rather an ugly expression came into his face at her prompt refusal of his wishes. He said bitterly: —

"Thank you for showing me so clearly how we stand. Thank God, I have still the mastery of myself, and can see that my only chance of safety lies in putting a stop to all, at once."

This idea did not find favor in Odile's eyes; lose her loaves and fishes? Not she! So she threw a clever counterfeit feeling into her voice, and said reproachfully: —

"Yes, you are right; the strength is all on your side, — and you abuse it. But I am glad that I am too weak to speak coldly of giving up what has become so dear to me, for you" —

"If you cared a tenth for me of what I care for you," he interrupted, "you would snap your fingers at the world and its gossip."

"How little you understand women! If I value my reputation, is it not on your account?"

"On *my* account?" he repeated, with a hard laugh.

"Yes, and yes, and yes! If you were free it would be my pride to give you of my best. The gift should be perfect — But this is idle," she broke off with a sigh. "Why dream of impossibilities?"

"*If you were free.*" The words seemed to have opened a door to him through which shone gleams of unhoped-for happiness. He started to his feet, and strode up and down the room pulling at his mustache. Odile watched him intently; she thought that he was fighting with his wounded pride, and was surprised when he came close to her, and said with a break in his voice: —

"And if I were free?"

"What do you mean? You are wild to hint at such things. Our church" —

"Our church," he broke in, "has infinite power to help those who are valuable to her."

The marquise shaded her eyes with her hand to conceal their expression; his tone of confidence

startled her, and she wanted all her *sang-froid* to see her way clear. She must not rouse his suspicions, and yet she must not say anything that might compromise her later.

"You are cruel to hold out such wild hopes, that can never be," she murmured. "I am only a woman, and am not strong enough to bear the uncertainty — the agitation. Think of the possible disappointment — it would kill me, I think."

"You shall be spared everything; I alone shall suffer!" exclaimed Félix; "but answer me. Should our church free me — were I free — would you, could you, be mine?"

He seized her hand with such fierceness that she was frightened; she must answer him; he had her cornered, and she saw it. Yet she made a last effort.

"Ah, my Félix, you know I love you! You know it!"

"That 's not enough," he said firmly.

One moment of silence, and then, "Yes, yes!" she cried; "but leave me — leave me now. I am horribly agitated by the thoughts, the hopes you have given me. I must be alone, or you will make me ill!"

She was pale, so pale that he yielded at once, and only raising her hand to his lips, an uncontrollable rigor in her arm as he touched her forbidding more, he left her.

Essentially a man of action, before twenty-four hours Félix had set in motion the machinery sug-

gested by Odile's four heedless words. Freedom! That was his aim. He applied first to Rome, and neither time, money, nor brains were spared by him. But even with Odile he preserved an unbroken silence on the subject.

She had been terribly alarmed at first, and had sought relief from her confessor. He gave her what she wanted, and his account of the long, difficult process generally necessary before a marriage could be annulled soothed her, while the civil divorce was put out of her head with a careless shrug. Diane would never give her husband the needed excuse for divorcing her legally.

"A Beaulieu, no temperament, and all the money she wants! Bah! She 's safe enough," decided the little marquise, who now gave all her attention to the juggling trick of trying to retain for herself and Félix their present apparently untenable positions. So she continued to wheedle and cajole him, flattering herself that his devotion was an unsuspected secret.

But secrets are not easy to keep in Paris, and before long the two principals were the only persons who were ignorant that their affairs were talked and laughed over in every club and in every salon. Even Diane heard of it, and, in spite of her indifference to her husband, realized that her dignity called upon her to renounce her intimacy with Madame de Lussac. There was more amusement than resentment in her heart on the subject, and she wondered honestly how Odile had the patience to encourage him.

She was beginning to find life in Paris rather dull, and, to her surprise, her thoughts had acquired a trick of running off to her father and Beaulieu. She was curious, too, to see how the château looked, completely restored as it was ; for Ernst had driven matters there during the last two years, and all had been retouched with the exception of the old wing, which had been reserved to the marquis, and which he seldom left.

Just at this juncture the good aunt Amélie died, and, seizing this event as an excuse to turn her back on Paris in all the bravery of its spring whirl, Diane decided to go home.

So it happened that one May afternoon, about ten days before Grafton Blake had taken up his abode at the Silver Crescent, the Baronne Ernst found herself in the train that was slowing up at the Amboise station. Her head coachman, with his army of underlings, had established himself in the gorgeous new stables a few days earlier, and Diane saw the flapping skirts of her footman as he hurried along the platform. But before he could reach the door of the carriage, Monsieur de Beaulieu, his cheeks pink and his solemn eyes lighted up with a ray of joy, had his trembling hand on the window ledge, while his face, full of yearning love, was held up to his daughter. The old woman went along by the train with her monotonous, birdlike pipe of "P'tit Journal! P'tit Journal!" and a vision of the day she left, her head full of hopes, so full that there had been no room for

fears, flashed before Diane. She sprang down into her father's arms, and there, before the obsequious station-master and all the passengers, put her head on his shoulder and burst into tears.

This was the return of which she had dreamed. Here was the triumphant princess. Here was the girl who had said with almost ferocious eagerness: —

"I will never come back Diane de Beaulieu!"

Well, she had kept her word.

CHAPTER V

Grafton awoke the morning after his installation at the Silver Crescent eager to begin work. The true spirit of art was his; he believed to an unlimited extent in the nobility and grandeur of his profession, was a passionate lover of nature, and generally had a stout faith in himself. This latter belief, however, was of a wavering sort, and there came tragic moments in the young fellow's life when he would cast his brushes on the floor, run his palette-knife through his canvas, and swear that he was fit for nothing but to paint signs. Fortunately these bad quarters of hours wore away, and, as a rule, were followed by a corresponding exhilaration of spirits, when he saw himself in the dim future among the masters. Had he come of a southern race these extremes, joined to his artistic temperament, might have borne evil consequences, but there is something eminently sane in New England blood to which obstacles serve as a spur, and his enabled him to keep himself in check under trying circumstances.

He was enjoying the happy medium, that blessed golden mean, as he came along the shady road after three good working hours in the meadow. Something in the atmosphere calmed even while it stim-

ulated him; he was willing to wait. He was thinking dispassionately of his limitations as he came easily along in the balmy air, Paddy as usual wheeling about him, and a small boy trudging at a respectful distance with his painting things, when he noticed a tall figure walking towards him. As the distance between them decreased he saw that the figure was that of a priest, and when they were abreast Grafton lifted his hat. The other stopped, and, holding out his hand, said in a voice of much penetration and individuality: —

"You are, I think, the young American stopping at the good Madame Richer's?"

Grafton bowed again, and said that he was.

"Then allow me, monsieur, to welcome you to our little community; your race and ours have a strong bond of sympathy, and it is always a pleasure to me to meet with one of your countrymen."

"You are very kind, monsieur le curé; I am beginning my fourth year in France, and I find that I grow fonder of it with every month."

"And where have you lived all that time?"

"In Paris; I am an art student," replied Grafton.

"Ah, don't confound French people with Parisians, I beg of you. If you have only known the frequenters of the great modern Babylon, I fear your ideas of us are not of an elevated description."

While the priest spoke Grafton observed him closely. He belonged to no common type; tall,

taller even than the young man, who was above the average height, he had a commanding presence in spite of a slight stoop; his nose was prominent, of the beaklike order, and the two eager, black, brilliant eyes, set very near together, seemed to be on the continual outlook for an enemy, so restless and piercing were they; the thin, mobile lips had a cruel expression, the upper one, which was long, being marked with fine vertical lines, as if he were in the habit of pursing up his mouth; standing bareheaded under the shade of the great trees that arched over the road from the château park, his forehead was plainly seen; a high narrow brow, the temples sunken as if they had been pressed together. His soutane was shiny and rubbed, but he wore it with an air that would have graced the robe of a cardinal, and his language was that of a cultivated man of letters, a little old-fashioned, but elegant and well chosen.

When Grafton had made some answer to his last remark, the old man went on with a pleasant smile that lighted up his somewhat sinister face: —

"Madame Richer called me in as I was passing to see something that she evidently considers a wonder, — your rubber tub."

Grafton laughed, and was about to give an account of the woes that "harmless, necessary" adjunct of the toilet had caused him in France, when he observed that the curé's eyes had wandered, and, turning, saw a most singular figure advancing towards them. It was that of a man in

the neighborhood of fifty, with a massive fishing-rod on his shoulder, and an enormous creel slung about his neck; he wore high boots to his knees, into which his trousers were tucked, and an old brown velveteen jacket of a jaunty cut; a brilliant blue worsted sash was twisted round his somewhat portly waist, and on his head was a wide-brimmed felt hat, with a peacock's feather stuck in the ribbon. His face was clean-shaven, and his cheeks shone like rosy apples; on each side of his head his hair, slightly powdered with silver, stood out in little tufts above his ears; his eyes were small and merry, and his nose and mouth looked as if they had the intention of coming nearer to each other in the course of time.

"This is our poet," said the curé in a low tone as the newcomer advanced rapidly towards them, a jolly smile on his beaming countenance, and his left hand extended. "Monsieur Vernon," he continued, "I wish to present you to my young acquaintance, monsieur" —

"Blake," interposed Grafton.

"A thousand thanks. Yes, Monsieur Blake. He is an American."

"Then you speak Spanish?" said the poet, shaking hands warmly. "I used to know a little Spanish myself in my young days; then I studied languages; now I study Language. Then I applied myself to the tongues of men; now I stammer the syllables of art."

"No, our young friend will speak English, I

think; it is so, is it not?" asked the curé politely.

Grafton had no time for more than a nod, for Monsieur Vernon broke in: —

"Then he will amuse your new pupil; when do you expect him, monsieur le curé?"

"I am on my way now to Amboise to meet him at the train. I am about to receive into my house," he went on, turning to Grafton, "a young Englishman who is preparing to enter the diplomatic service, and is desirous to perfect himself in French, the language of courts."

"A tiara as it were, studded with gems — tropes and emeralds, epigrams and rubies," put in Monsieur Vernon.

"Ah, symbolist, symbolist!" said the curé, shaking his long forefinger, curved like a claw, at the complacent poet. "Always thinking of your trade!"

The smile accompanying this remark was not frank; it hid something not unlike a sneer, but Vernon did not notice it.

"I have the honor," he said, turning to Grafton with a gesture of pride, "to be a humble foot-soldier in that advance guard on the road to glory whose members rejoice in the name of 'Les Jeunes.'"

"That is most interesting to me!" exclaimed Grafton, alert at once. "All these movements have their significance; and even if one is not wholly sympathetic with them, it is certain that they leave a residuum of good results."

Monsieur Vernon carefully put his rod down, and lifting his sombrero with one hand, he extended the other to the stranger.

"Monsieur, your sentiments delight me; I see in you a hopeful soul, one without prejudice, who may be coyly coaxed into the only true fold."

"Thank you," returned Grafton, much amused by the gravity with which this was said.

"Will you do me the honor of coming to my house this afternoon, and allow me to read some of my offspring to you?"

"With great pleasure."

"Then it is *au revoir*. I shall expect you at about four. I must hurry now, for my good wife will be waiting breakfast."

"Have you had a fortunate morning?" asked the curé, lifting, as he spoke, the lid of the creel.

There, in the dim vastness of the receptacle, lay one poor little fish.

"I don't fish for material gain," snapped the poet, slamming down the cover. "I find that my thoughts never flow so lucidly as when I am by the marge of some gentle stream with my rod in my hand. Once more, good-morning," and waving his hat he walked jauntily away, giving the effect of a middle-aged tenor inadequately dressed for light opera.

The curé looked after him, a smile not wholly guiltless of a sneer playing round his mouth.

"He is good at heart, and, luckily for him, has enough money to indulge in this sort of nonsense.

He writes a great deal of poetry, but I confess that I do not understand it."

Why is this superior air so often assumed by the person who admits that he is incapable of understanding the thoughts of others? It is something to grieve rather than rejoice the man who finds no delight in the writings of Browning or Emerson, but in nine cases out of ten he states his incapacity with a smile of indulgence for those weak-minded creatures who imagine any pleasure to be gained from reading such works.

"Every innovation is interesting to me," answered Grafton. "I am very glad that I 'm to hear some of this school of poetry from the lips of the author. I have studied Mallarmé and some of the others, but my knowledge of French is too limited to see my way clearly."

"Yet you speak admirably," said the curé, with a sweeping bow. "Now I must be going on my way, for the road is long, and the sun is hot. Will you give us also the pleasure of seeing you at the presbytery, let us say next Thursday? My good sister will give you a warm welcome, and it will be a comfort to my new pupil to hear his own tongue, as I understand he knows very little French."

Grafton accepted willingly enough, and glanced after the priest as he walked along the road, his skirts swinging gently, his head slightly bent under its shovel hat, the whole impression left on the mind being that some bird of prey had passed,

dimming for the moment the radiance of the May sunshine.

Madame Richer was waiting at the door, on the lookout for her lodger, and showed her white teeth for a moment as Grafton came up.

"I have not begun your omelette; I saw you talking with monsieur le curé. Ah, these men of God, they are more inquisitive than any woman. Nothing would suit him but being taken up to see if monsieur were well placed. He said that Americans were fond of luxury, and insisted on poking his nose into every corner. He said it was for my good, so I need not lose a paying customer through my ignorance, but I know that he wanted to see for himself what sort of dressing things monsieur has. As if he did n't know that I was accustomed to gentlefolk, more than ever he was, I 'll be bound. Old raven, with his sharp eyes gimleting through monsieur's dressing-case!"

Grafton was annoyed.

"Don't allow any one to go into my rooms in my absence," he said a little sharply. "While I pay for them they are mine, and you can say with truth that you have no right to open the door except to keep them in order."

"Ah, monsieur does n't consider that we must obey our priests, no matter what they bid us do."

An excellent breakfast banished Grafton's irritation, being like most men more docile after a good meal than before it; and it was with a light

heart that he set out to find Monsieur Vernon's house later in the afternoon. The way was not complicated, for he had only to follow the lane running at right angles to the main road, skirting the Beaulieu estate, and after he had wound up a gentle incline for about half a mile, the poet's house appeared, looking pretty much like any other modern bourgeois house in that part of France. It was long and shallow, being but one room deep. Before it was a small terrace, or raised court, surrounded by a border of flowers in full spring beauty, and commanding an exquisite view of the river with its green meadows. The low wall surrounding the terrace seemed much older than the house, and was covered with a mass of ivy; in the corner was a picturesque old well, lined with emerald moss, its stone canopy or hood being draped with a luxuriant Virginia creeper. It was an enticing subject for a study, the intense shade under its arched hood in strong contrast with the delicate green and faint copper of the vine through which the sun shone, making the leaves almost transparent. Grafton stared at it while waiting for the maid who had admitted him into the court to announce him, and he wondered if he would be considered a barbarian should he ask permission to sketch it. His reflections were cut short by the appearance of the poet, arrayed in a costume fresher and cleaner, but if possible more fantastic, than the one he had worn in the morning. It was a knickerbocker suit of silver-gray ribbed vel-

veteen; his well-turned legs were encased in stockings of the same shade clocked with violet, and his sash and cravat were violet also. It must be acknowledged that the effect was very pretty, the colors harmonizing well with the powdery tufts of hair above each ear.

Monsieur Vernon greeted his guest with much cordial kindness, and begged him to be seated in one of the light iron chairs on the terrace, as the day was so warm and beautiful that his wife and daughter had planned to have tea out of doors.

Grafton felt a vague wonder as to what the female variety of this marvelous male would be, but it was soon satisfied, for before the first conventional remarks had been concluded Madame Vernon came from the house, followed by her daughter. The mother was a graceful, ladylike woman, who showed before ten minutes had elapsed that she adored and venerated her husband; and the daughter, — but no; Suzette must have a fresh paragraph all to herself.

In appearance she was not beautiful, but there was something more potent to charm in her sweet face than mere conventional beauty. Her complexion was rich and glowing, telling of health and fresh air; her hair, coiled at the back of her round, prettily poised head, was dark, but the sun brought out latent streaks of red bronze in it; and her eyes were as clear as water gushing from a spring, brown, with little shafts of golden light that radiated from the pupils. Expressive eyes they were,

ready to sparkle with fun, for Suzette dearly loved a jest, to soften at the sufferings of others, or to veil themselves at high, noble thoughts, that spoke directly to her high, noble soul. A gallant, pure, sincere creature was this young girl, living her secluded life, and never dreaming that she was in any way better than hundreds of others. In fact, at times thinking that she must be very wicked indeed, for truth should be spoken at any price, and it must be stated now and here that Suzette had a quick temper that sometimes led her to do and say things of which she bitterly repented afterwards, but which never betrayed her into a single sulky moment. We may laugh as much as we please at the notion of an aura being visible about every individual, and some of us do laugh loud and long; but it cannot be denied that we all carry about with us an atmosphere of our own, which may be invisible to the bodily eye, but which is perfectly perceptible nevertheless. So it happened that Grafton had not been in Suzette's presence for half an hour before he was impressed by a sense of how *real* she was.

A maid had followed closely at the heels of her mistress with a tea-tray, which she placed on a small table.

"Do you drink tea, Monsieur Blake?" asked Madame Vernon anxiously.

Suzette gave a triumphant little nod when he assured her mother that he was a confirmed tea-drinker.

"I knew you would be," she said, looking full at him with no suspicion of coquetry. "I spend two months every year with mamma's aunt in Dublin, and we see a great many officers there who are always ready for their '*four o'clock.*' "

"My daughter brought home a small chest of English tea with her last autumn," said Monsieur Vernon, watching Suzette as she lighted the spirit-lamp under the tea-kettle. "How many thoughts one of these little leaves inspires in a poetic mind!" he went on, picking a tea-leaf from the caddy.

"How it inspires us with Oriental dreams of nature's prodigality, her generosity, her unfathomable — Suzette, my love," he interrupted himself, "surely you are putting in too many spoonfuls."

The girl looked at him with a sort of indulgent affection, as if she were the older of the two.

"Papa, dear, do you keep your mind on nature's prodigality and never mind mine. I have aunt Norah's receipt for tea-making, one spoonful for each person and one for the tea-pot, and wild horses can't drag me from it."

Her father looked for a moment as if he wished to pursue the subject, but evidently thought better of it, for he turned to Grafton with the frown clearing from his brow, and asked him point-blank how he had liked the curé. Observing his visitor's evident surprise, he continued: —

"I ask, because it is a subject of much discussion between myself and my daughter. She has some rather advanced opinions for a well-brought-

up girl, and does not hesitate to state that she dislikes him. We all know that it is owing to his unfortunate lack of self-control that he is kept shut up in this little village, which must be a sort of exile to a man of his mental ability; but as far as I see, he does his duty by his flock."

"I have seen him only for a few moments, but he struck me as a cultivated man," said Grafton, standing ready to take the cups from Suzette's hands.

"Yes; too much so for his position here. He talks over the heads of the peasant women, who make up his congregation. Monsieur de Beaulieu goes to mass regularly, but with that exception, and my wife and daughter, there are only twenty women; he has frightened the men all away."

"That 's a pity, is n't it?" asked Grafton, seating himself.

"Are you a Catholic, monsieur?" interposed Madame Vernon.

"No, madame."

"Ah," she replied rather vaguely, not understanding his mental position.

"I don't see why *you* should think it a pity then," said the poet frankly.

"Because from my point of view the worst thing that can come to a country is this spirit of indifference which is so common in France among the men."

"It may be," returned Monsieur Vernon. "But it is a fact, and our curé has a hard fight with his

people. The mayor of Beaulieu, a nice, honest fellow, is at daggers drawn with the church. He is as near an atheist as he can be, and takes delight in worrying the curé. The common run of people need religion, and it 's a shame to set the government against it. Take the mayor, for an example. He has a little money, and is at every one's beck and call; he is a bit of a doctor, and hardly a winter passes without his being called up more than once in the middle of the night to go and see some sick person. But wild horses can't drag him to mass, and he swears that if he had a wife he would forbid her the confessional."

"It is shocking," said Madame Vernon.

"It all comes from your saying 'religion,' when you mean only 'church,'" remarked Grafton.

"And what would you say?" demanded the lady, with some asperity.

"That was a hasty speech, and of course I don't mean it literally. What I want to say is, that in France religion is falsely confused with Catholicism; they often go together, but they are quite separate things."

Suzette paused at this remark, cream-jug in hand, and stood looking at him attentively, as if pondering on its meaning.

"Not in our eyes," said Madame Vernon a little stiffly, and, seeing that he would only argue in a circle if he explained further, Grafton broached the subject of his host's poems.

"Who are your publishers?" he asked.

Monsieur Vernon inflated his cheeks and looked pompous.

"My art, like my fishing, is not for material gain," he replied enigmatically. "I have had a few dozen copies of my favorite poems printed for private circulation only; here is one of them."

As he spoke he took a minute volume bound in orange kid from his breast pocket, and added, "Would you like to hear one of the shorter ones?"

Grafton assented. He was much interested in that brilliant progress of the world which finds its largest utterance in France, and was glad to come in contact with one of its active members.

Suzette was busy among the flowers in the border, cutting off the faded lilies-of-the-valley; Madame Vernon had gone into the house as soon as she had swallowed her tea, murmuring something about being chilly; there was nothing to disturb them, and the poet, having turned over several pages cleared his throat and began: —

"Her voice of golden moire àntique" —

"I beg your pardon," interrupted untactful Grafton. "What did you say?"

"I said, 'Her voice of golden moire antique,'" repeated Monsieur Vernon testily. "Perhaps you don't understand what that means?"

"I don't think I do," answered Grafton humbly. "In English moire antique is a sort of silk; my mother had a pink one once."

"And it means just the same thing in French to those who have only the gross ears of animals!"

exclaimed Vernon excitedly. "To a poetic nature that one line would be enough to place me as a master! In the first place, it brings to the mind's eye — the poetic eye — something rich and costly; then the color adds an Eastern glow; then the fashion of the silk, lined with delicate marks, as a summer wind breathes on the surface of a blue lake, suggests a temperament of exquisite sensibility. I fear, monsieur, that you are but a groveler, for to the truly æsthetic soul only these few words are needed to bring up a full-length portrait of a beautiful woman, her long hair like masses of marigolds falling to her feet, her eyes blue as the lake by which she dwells, her — But forgive me," he broke off bitterly. "It is not good to cast our pearls before" —

"Papa," interposed Suzette, who had drawn near and heard the last of his tirade, "Monsieur Blake does not know us well enough to feel the compliment you are paying him. Papa only abuses those for whom he has a real regard," she said, lifting her eyes to Grafton's; she was not very tall.

He had been rather startled by the violence of his host's attack, and welcomed the aid of this determined ally.

"I am in fault, too," he said. "But my excuse is that we men of the studio are so used to giving and taking rough criticisms, that we are apt to forget our manners when it is a question of another art. Besides," he added slyly, "Verlaine says he does not aim at being understood at once."

"You have said everything that a gentleman could say," declared the offended poet, rising and clearing his ruddy face from its gloom. "Let us be friends, but never ask me again to read you one of my poems."

They shook hands warmly, and then Grafton began to ask questions about the old well, following Suzette to its brink. Madame Vernon came out of the house wrapped in a large blue shawl, and sat gazing adoringly at her husband, who had thrown himself into an attitude expressive of deep thought, his arms folded on his breast, and his eyes fixed on the distant meadows.

"I find your well very picturesque," said Grafton, approaching Madame Vernon. "I wonder if I may impose still further on your kindness, and ask permission to sketch it."

"Nothing would give us greater pleasure," she replied politely, looking round for her husband to second her, but he was in a fine poetic reverie, and noticed nothing, so she continued: "You might put Suzette in the foreground, and call it 'Rebecca at the Well.'"

"Would n't that be what learned people call an an-ach-ro-nism?" asked Suzette, her eyes dancing as she stumbled over the long word.

"If I ever had the honor of painting mademoiselle, I should not think it necessary to put in any adjuncts," said Grafton.

"Aha! You 've been in old Ireland! You 've kissed the Blarney stone!" exclaimed Suzette.

"Mamma is half Irish, so she knows what that means, and that is the reason I have so much more liberty than most girls. You must understand, Monsieur Blake, that I am called quite American here, because I am allowed to walk alone to the village."

"Has Monsieur Blake seen our glimpse of the Château of Amboise?" interposed Madame Vernon rising, and leading the way to a corner of the court.

As they stood leaning on the old wall, and drinking in the beauty of the scene, she suddenly gave a little cry of dismay.

"Your father has fallen asleep! He is so imprudent, out in the air like this," she said, going swiftly towards the poet, and taking her shawl from her shoulders she wrapped it gently about him.

"That is just like mamma," said Suzette in a confidential tone. "She never thinks of herself for a moment when he is concerned."

She disappeared into the house, and returned with another shawl which she folded round her mother. Grafton surprised a quick glance of love and confidence as it flashed between the two, and found it a very lovely thing. Then they resumed their chat, until he felt that he must not wear out his welcome.

"Papa, wake up!" called Suzette. "Monsieur Blake is going."

"I have not been asleep for one moment," said the poet indignantly, rising as he spoke, and ad-

vancing with grave dignity, the dignity of a great man who has been wounded, but can still forgive, utterly unconscious that the blue shawl was trailing behind him. Naughty Suzette went off into a peal of laughter, and after a vain struggle to keep his gravity Grafton joined in it. Monsieur Vernon was unaware of the cause of their mirth, until the end of the shawl getting between his feet made him skip nimbly quite against his will. For one second he looked as if about to launch a thunderbolt on their irreverent heads, but his amiable disposition got the upper hand, and he said, with a look of humorous resignation: —

"Well, well, women must be fools, because the Lord meant that they should be."

Wide awake now, he offered to walk down to the village with Grafton, saying that he expected a package of books from Paris, which would be delivered at the Silver Crescent by a diligence that ran three times a week between Amboise and a town beyond Beaulieu. As they walked he showed a new side of his character, asking many shrewd and intelligent questions regarding investments in the United States.

"I am afraid that I can't give you much information of value, but I shall be delighted to write to my agent, and he will tell you everything you want to know," said Grafton.

"That is very kind of you, and I accept your offer gratefully. I know that I am called a skinflint by my neighbors, and they may be right; but

I have a reason for hoarding. My wife and I have had such an exceptionally happy life, although we married for love, that we have decided to let our dear little girl marry the man she loves, if possible. And our great ambition is to save enough for her *dot*, so that the objection of poverty may not stand in her way."

The frankness of this affectionate avowal, so uncharacteristic of his own race in its want of self-consciousness, touched Grafton.

The air was full of cheerful sounds as they came slowly down the hill and drew nearer to the village, — the laughter of children just out of school, whither they were forced by the temporal authorities, and taught, as the church party insisted, every species of impiety; the ringing sound of the cooper's blows, putting some barrels in order for the autumn vintage; the bray of a donkey as he caught sight of home, and wagged his long ears in vexation at the delay caused by his mistress, who had stopped to exchange a word of greeting with a friend, making a picture of sturdy health as she stood by her cart piled high with green fodder for her cows, and turned her sunburnt face under its snowy cap to stare at Madame Richer's foreigner, — not a rude stare, but one full of friendly interest, which widened into a smile as she wished the two gentlemen a good-evening. On their right ran the stone wall of the Beaulieu property, which covered the hill opposite the Vernon house, and stretched far away over the uplands.

"I want to look at the ironwork on the gates here; it looked very handsome as I came by; fifteenth century, I should say."

"Go slowly, then; here comes the Beaulieu carriage. We 'll look after it goes by," said Vernon, holding back a little.

A victoria advanced, as he spoke, at a rapid pace, and swept round the curve through the open gates. The occupant lifted his hat as Vernon bowed, and Grafton had time to see that his face wore a drawn, harassed expression.

"That," said the poet, "is Baron Ernst, the rich Jew who married the heiress of Beaulieu."

"Yes, I know," replied Grafton, turning to examine the ironwork which had attracted him before. As he did so his attention was caught by the baron's face, staring at him from over the hood of the victoria, now going less rapidly, as the hill was steep at that point. It wore a curious look of brutal curiosity. Grafton met it fully, but before it was quite impressed on his mind the baron drew back, and the carriage was lost to sight.

CHAPTER VI

Félix had come to Beaulieu to watch Diane. To win the game he was playing he could not let her remain too long out of his sight. The news from Rome was at last encouraging, but if Odile played with him like a cat, the ecclesiastical powers had been playing with him like a panther. His hopes, never allowed to fall quite to the ground, were sometimes tossed so high that they seemed to have reached the sun, but the descent that followed was swift and breathless. Never before had he been so baffled, so the helpless toy of others' wills.

Another reason that brought him to the country was the need for a little rest. His nerves had begun to give out, and his general health suffered also, making such a change in his face that Diane, who met him as he was crossing the hall just after his arrival at Beaulieu, noticed it, and said indifferently: —

"Ah! You here? Are you ill?"

"No, I am not," he answered shortly. "Why do you ask?"

"Only because you look so yellow and good for nothing. Also, because it seemed the only thing that might bring you to this festive place."

"I hope you 're not tired of it already, and want to go back?" insinuated Félix.

"Not at all. I loathe Paris, and mean to stay here until January."

"I shall, too," he replied, his plan being to drive her back to the centre of temptation. There was little chance of her falling into any indiscretion at Beaulieu. He knew everybody within intrigue reach, knew not only their names, their fortunes, and their family trees, but, to do his penetration credit, knew the characters of almost all. There was one exception; he had not quite fathomed the village curé. To Ernst the word "avarice" was written in large letters on the narrow brow and in the grasping fingers of the autocrat of the hamlet. But he had not looked deep enough to see that the avarice was for his church, not for himself, and that the ruling passion of the old man's life was to redeem his past in the eyes of his bishop, and gain recognition before his death. For his past had been stormy, and marked by one failure after another, caused by his imperious, ungovernable temper. Well educated, of a good middle-class family, more than ordinarily intellectual, he had been degraded from the fairly high position to which he had attained when comparatively young, and had been placed in this small, obscure hamlet. He, conscious of possessing an eloquence the equal of any popular Parisian *prédicateur*, was condemned to address, week after week, a handful of ignorant rustics, who fretted and fidgeted to be away in their fields, from which they forced their livelihood. In his darkest moment, when bitter hopelessness

was gaining possession of him, the idea came into his mind to wrest from the peasantry enough money to restore the old church, and thus compel his bishop to acknowledge him as a useful member of the vast community. This idea became a fixture in his brain. For many years he had hoarded the copper coins, reluctantly paid by his congregation to save them a few years of purgatory, but the hope had almost died away, when the new régime was established at the château. At last he felt that his chance had come, and while Félix was taking stock of his character he had been playing the same game. His first thought had been that now he would be required to say mass every Sunday in the chapel of the château, which would give him a social standing in his own eyes. But in this he was disappointed, for the baron was seldom there more than two or three days at a time, Monsieur de Beaulieu was quite content to go to the service in the village church, seating himself in his own sanctum, hidden from the stare of the crowd, and coming and going by his private door, while Diane openly discouraged every attempt to tie her down to a regular religious engagement of any sort. Indeed, between her and the curé was almost war. Soon after her return to her old home as Madame Ernst, he had taken her to task, very gently, regarding the subject of confession. She had turned on him in all the quivering susceptibility of her wounded pride.

"Confession is, you claim, a sacrament?"

"Certainly, madame la baronne."

"And marriage is another?"

"Doubtless."

"Then, monsieur le curé, you must not take it amiss if I, who have been forced to and sold at the altar, put them on the same footing, and decide to give up the luxury of gaining absolution from your holy self. I know that what I say is not at all the correct thing in the world where I live, but I am strong enough there now to make my own fashions, even to have imitators."

Naturally this conversation put an end to any hopes on the curé's part of gaining influence through the great lady of the place, so he was on the alert for Félix.

Two or three days after Grafton's arrival, one of those wind-storms, common in the Loire valley, arose, bringing fresh fears to the mind of the curé for the safety of his cherished church. With his long soutane flapping about him, his head bent down, he struggled along the short walk between the door of his house and the church porch. The clouds were dark, and hung low; now and then a burst of rain would be blown eastward, so fast that it seemed to be but spray. The old man was breathless by the time he gained shelter, and stood a moment in the portico, before entering. To him this exquisite sonnet, writ in stone by a forgotten architect, was but a means to his personal aggrandizement. The vaulted roof was supported in the centre by a single detached column of fluted white

stone, giving the impression in its slender erectness of the shaft of a fountain, which fell in foamy duplicates against the surrounding walls. Outside the wind howled and raged, while the curé looked with the careful eye of a housekeeper at every chip in the soft material, and sighed to think that this storm might put him further off than ever from the realization of his ambition. He opened the old door cautiously, so as to give the ravager as little chance as possible to push in after him. In the dim light he looked like a giant bat, flitting here and there, never resting. High over his head the windows rattled and shook in the blast. Many of them were simply common glass, but a few had kept traces of their former splendor, and jewel-like gleams threw dancing lights on sunny days over the rude pavement, worn into inequalities by centuries of worshiping feet. The curé sat down opposite one of the most perfectly preserved of these windows, and, folding his arms, gazed up at the brilliant greens, while he wondered for the hundredth time why such a large edifice had been built in this obscure corner, and what its history was. There was nothing to guide him to the discovery of any facts. The Marquis de Beaulieu had tried to help him by searching in his family archives, but had failed. Outside a huge, leaden human figure, posed just under the clock-tower, holding in its hand a scroll with the words, "Le temps s'enfuit, l'éternité s'avance," seemed to indicate the primitive taste of some dark interlude in

the progress of art. The curé had decided to abolish this curious addition, and as he sat dreaming in the noisy dusk, his thoughts flowed in their usual practical channels.

"Ten thousand francs at one blow would do no more than make the place storm-proof. Oh, why am I so powerless? Why have I not the money to force the bishop to see what I am? Time flies, eternity advances. My God! it is too true, too true, and I am growing old, my time is short, and I must die dumb. I must fade into nothingness — what am I saying? 'The resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.' It was not my fault that I spoke so; my thoughts ran away with me."

He shut away these disturbing ideas, and closing his eyes pictured the day when he could lead the bishop into *his* house, — not God's, — and show him what the despised country priest had done. The lights should burn on the altar, glittering with gold and embroidery; the sun should stream through a thousand panes of glass, more beautiful than had ever been seen. The excitement of his fancies was so strong that a fresh onslaught from the wind roused him with a fast-beating heart, and he opened his eyes just in time to see the lead framework of the window opposite him blown in and the splintered glass fall in atoms on the pavement.

The vision of the glorified church and the dazzled bishop faded away, leaving the bitter memory of the inadequate heap of coppers in his possession,

the fruit of many years' work and begging. He clinched his hands, raising them high above his bent head, and, with an exclamation stifled on his lips, sped out into the storm.

His one thought now was his need of money; he must have it for his purpose. Every gust of wind was putting him just so far back. "Le temps s'enfuit;" he must hurry. Heedless of the rain, he turned up the Beaulieu avenue. Félix had never snubbed him when he had intimated to him his desire to restore the church; he had even made vague half promises to "see to it." Now he was the curé's last plank.

The footman who opened the door to him showed him at first into the long salon, where Diane was yawning over the fire, a novel in her hand. She gave an undisguised pout when she saw who had interrupted her pretense of reading.

"Only you! Why didn't you bring your new pupil to amuse me? Or, better still, the good-looking artist at the Crescent? He might have kept me from being bored to death."

The curé, who had murmured a good-day on entering, maintained a severe silence, which Diane was on the point of breaking when the footman reappeared with a message to the effect that monsieur le baron would be glad to receive monsieur le curé in the library. The priest rose, bending his long body with a formal sweep to Diane, who tossed over her shoulder the remark, "Don't forget to tell the artist that he had better come to the château; I 'm longing for a flirtation!"

He was not amused by her levity, intended merely to shock him, still less annoyed by it. Cattle of her sort were all alike, and although he made a struggle to feel shocked at her recklessly expressed disdain of holy things, in his heart he considered a woman's soul hardly worth the saving. His ears did prick up a little at her parting shot as he was leaving the room: —

"You will find the baron in the devil's own humor, monsieur le curé. All his pride of race is roused over the cost of the repairs, and he thought of shutting up the château until I suggested he 'd better begin with the marquise."

The hint did not stop him, but it caused him to approach the baron with an added delicacy.

Félix was seated before a large table adding a list of figures; he glanced up and nodded at the entrance of his visitor, and only pushed the paper aside when he had finished the last row. Then, in a curt manner, which never attained even in his own ears the true ring of superiority, he said: —

"Sit down, monsieur le curé. Your errand must be pressing to bring you out in such a tempest."

"It is, monsieur le baron; or it seems so to me. This wind is playing havoc with the church. The building should be repaired at once."

"And so you come to me, eh?"

"Yes, monsieur le baron. Your charities in Paris have been too well" — The word *advertised* was on the tip of his tongue, but he drew up sharp,

and added, after a trifling hesitation, "too gratefully received by the clergy for me to feel any shame in appealing to your generosity, here, on your own ground."

Félix barely heard him out. An impatient scowl darkened his face, and his voice was bitterly hard as he said: —

"You come at the wrong moment. I 'm in no generous mood."

"Be it so," replied the curé, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I am sorry that the affairs of monsieur le baron are not going well."

"Oh, it 's not that," said Ernst quickly, stung by any uncomplimentary suggestion regarding his credit. "My business affairs were never more profitable — never."

"Ah, then, it is monsieur le baron's happiness," sighed the curé, recalling Diane's hint of a marquise.

Ernst shot him a glance, and there was such inquiry in it that the curé resumed: —

"Monsieur le baron is a noble of the church. I am a priest, and madame la baronne does not confess to me. We need have no secrets from each other — aid for aid, rather."

Again their eyes spoke before Ernst said: "I take you at your word, monsieur le curé, and will tell you the secret. You know I am a person of influence at Rome. What you do not know is, that I have here, in this very drawer, under my hand, a letter from the highest authority, telling

me that the annulling of my marriage is merely a question of presentation. That I am, so far as the religious part goes, a free man."

"What power, to gain such a difficult point!" cried the curé, half incredulous.

"But what is it worth to me?" exclaimed Ernst. "This cursed civil law holds me bound — bound! My liberty is as far off as ever, and my liberty I must have! *Must! Must!*"

He strode up and down the room three or four times. The fierceness of his longing for Odile was at its height that day, when, after the success of half his plans, the other half seemed hopelessly beyond him.

The curé tightened his lips, making the vertical lines more than usually pronounced, and scanned the baron closely. The revelation that had just burst forth, as it were against his will, startled the priest; he felt that he saw before him a more potent force than he had suspected. A man who pulled strings at Rome, and gained what he wished, filled the heart of the old priest with admiration and envy. Could he make an alliance which would work for his good?

"On what grounds will Rome declare your marriage void?" he inquired gently.

"Constraint. The baronne was forced into the match."

"Perfectly. I can bear testimony to the fact myself. The baronne declared to me only the other day that she had been forced to and sold at

the altar. Those were her exact words. You may have my deposition when the time comes."

Ernst's eyes sparkled; he had counted on a servant only for his proof, now that the good aunt Amélie was dead. He felt drawn closer to the priest.

"But the legal divorce!" he cried. "There 's the rub. The religious cassation of my marriage is all that I really care for; but it is not enough. I must have the legal divorce. Until I have grounds for that, I am as much bound as if Rome had turned her back on me. And how can I get sufficient evidence? The baronne is as cold as an iceberg; there is no chance of her compromising herself. The other grounds are unavailable. Ah, if the power the church makes such a boast about was worth anything, I should be able to get any amount of proofs; and to the man that brought them to me I would show my gratitude by more than words. You come here whining about your little matter of repairs! If you could help me, if you had any real influence, and could bring me means to gain my freedom, I would rebuild the church so that it should be the pride of Touraine, and I would rebuild it in your name. But you are like the rest of your race and profession. You talk, you blow, but you do nothing."

Félix had grown excited as he talked. He was chafing with the sense of his powerlessness, and this immovable, unimpressionable figure before him goaded him on. He had even spoken of "your race," admitting that he was of another.

The curé's keen ears had caught the sound, and his keen brain had caught the sense, of a deep meaning beneath the rush of passionate words. He leaned forward, fixing Félix with his hawklike look. He must know just what the other meant, just how far he had intended his hints to carry.

In spite of his narrow sphere the priest was no mean reader of his fellow men, as clever perhaps as the Jew in this game. But while they both saw the seamy side of mankind, passing over the higher qualities as of little value, the curé, who had had fewer opportunities of studying human nature, was rendered more arrogant by his own limits. To Félix, Diane was a subtle composition, complicating his plans; to the curé she was but a woman, with all the weakness and vanity of her despised sex. He therefore gave his shoulders a barely perceptible shrug of incredulity when the baron pronounced her as cold as an iceberg, and recalled her remarks about the artist.

"Monsieur le baron," he said, "it is my duty to see that any decree of the church is given full force and effect everywhere. As we regard the civil ceremony as naught, we may stretch a point or two in dealing with it. I do not feel that your case is so desperate."

"She will never give me that chance," said Ernst.

"She may give us the evidence that tends to prove it, by her reckless conduct," suggested the curé, rising.

Félix stopped short in his walk, and looked the curé hard in the face. It was his turn to learn something new about his companion, and he noted the smile of infinite cunning, and recognized the powerful will and mind lurking behind it with a glow of self-congratulation, for did not these words of his prove that they were now at his service? Had he not bought them?

"You had better give orders to have the most needed repairs at the church attended to at once," he said. "Of course at my expense. The future depends on you."

"I think that we understand one another," said the curé, gliding towards the door. "I am on my way home to a little festival arranged by my sister for the young people, and I will stop at the carpenter's in passing. With your permission I shall present my pupil and the young American who is at the Crescent to you before long, and you will do well to present them to the baronne — especially the American."

"The sooner the better. I see that you know your way in the dark!" returned Félix, with a coarse laugh. "In my absence you will be my eyes and ears."

He stood at the window after the curé's departure, watching the tall, black figure swooping along beneath the writhing trees, and weighed the chances of his success. The more he thought of the character of the old man, the more he realized the advantage of having him for an ally. Whether or

not he would go to the length of his insinuations remained to be proved, but Félix felt sure that under certain conditions he would be capable of taking but one view of Diane's conduct. The priest's crude arrogance would lead him to conclusions which might fail to convince a man of the world more versed in the delicate shadings of women. Félix decided that the curé should have the field, and that Diane might remain at Beaulieu for the present. His memory, stimulated by the curé's remarks, reverted to the stalwart, good-looking young American, and the more he reflected, the stronger grew his hopes, so that at last, writing to Odile with his Roman triumph warm at his heart, his pen ran away with him, and he ended his letter: "A good day's work, my Odile; we are nearer by many months than we were two hours ago."

CHAPTER VII

Mademoiselle Mathilde had been heartbroken when the day of her little tea-party dawned so inauspiciously. She ruefully regarded the *galette* and *brioche* ordered with prudent forethought, and kept diving into her brother's study to pester him for his opinion.

Poor little mademoiselle! How many just such patient, self-sacrificing, uncomplaining women there are in the world. And how seldom are they appreciated by more than one or two of their nearest friends; never those for whom they have made the sacrifice, be it understood.

The curé, wrapped up in himself, would have thrown a scoffing smile and denial had he been told that it was for him that his sister had remained unmarried. But it was the truth nevertheless. He was to her not only her well-loved brother, but the earthly representative of the Master whom she adored. So the offering of her small fortune was made in a double sense when she decided to devote it all to her brother, and give up any hopes of a home with a husband and children of her own. It was done with very little thought of self, and she considered herself much less holy than those women who enter convents. But the

knowledge that she had made a sacrifice was there, singing a low, rippling melody, keeping her heart young and sympathetic through all her petty trials.

Truly the family genius had shown a poor capacity for division when he superintended the gifts for brother and sister. Or he may have been a lazy spirit. At all events, be it one way or the other, the curé had all the brains tucked into his cradle, and mademoiselle all the heart. They might have played "Open the gates as high as the sky," asking each individual passing under their uplifted arms, "Which do you choose? Heart or intellect?"

Mademoiselle's life was filled with "duties enough and little cares," and, on the whole, was fairly happy. She had her housekeeping, which was a fine art with her; also her church embroidery, which was not a fine art in any sense of the word, but the gentle soul was convinced that every one of the hideous stitches with which she covered whole acres of canvas was acceptable in the eyes of the saints, and would mitigate her purgatorial career. She counted on them for help much more than on her devotion to her brother. An unfailing source of excitement to her was her interest in the inmates of the château; she of course never dined there with her brother, but the marquis often sent her a present of game in the hunting season, and the baron had been very civil to her whenever they had met. It was in Diane, however, that her interest centred; Diane, who as a little girl used

to come occasionally for lessons on the embroidery frame, whose abrupt, domineering manners made her such a contrast to Suzette, mademoiselle's darling, but who nevertheless possessed an unholy interest for the old lady. Her habit was of a Sunday evening, when she was alone, her brother eating his dinner with his châtelain, to have a simple nondescript meal brought to the salon, and when she had disposed of it, and the trim maid had taken away the tray and mended the fire, to sit before it with her skirt thriftily turned up over her underpetticoat, and plan schemes to get some item of news from the curé on his return. As he had never gratified her in the smallest particular this was a futile waste of time, but she enjoyed making her little plots. Her maid had once intimated to her that the baronne was guilty of the enormity of smoking. Mademoiselle had fluttered all over with the excitement of the guilty knowledge.

"Jeanne, you should be very careful, my child, about gossiping; it is a vile practice. Who told you such a thing?"

"The footman, mademoiselle," said Jeanne, blushing. "He went by the garden when I was gathering the strawberries for mademoiselle's dinner, and he said he was on his way to the Silver Crescent for a package of the baronne's cigarettes which was to come by express."

So, with this clue, mademoiselle would plot to surprise her brother into admitting that the doings among the great folk were not all that they should be.

"I will say, offhand-like," she would ponder, "'Bless me, how your soutane smells of smoke! One would say that they were all chimneys at the château, and not only Madame Ernst!'"

But when his dark presence appeared at the door of the salon, making her little treasures, her two portraits of their parents, her carefully disposed vases, and even her bouquet of wax flowers seem frivolous under his austere influence, the carefully prepared innuendoes would die on her tongue, and she would find courage only to ask if he had enjoyed his evening, and timidly add, "What did you have for dinner?" to which modest question she never received an answer.

Fifty times at least during the day that had proved so momentous to both Félix and the curé had she interrupted the lesson being given to the budding diplomatist, young Temple, by putting in her head at the door, her round blue eyes expressing deep anxiety, and saying: "Pardon, monsieur le curé," — she always gave him his title, — "I won't disturb you again, but *would* you advise me to arrange for this afternoon? *Do* you think the rain will cease? Tell me truly."

And, after all, there had been no need for so much worry, as Suzette and her mother made an early appearance in the funny old calash drawn by the Vernon horse-of-all-work, and Grafton had followed before mademoiselle had had time to wonder more than eighteen times if he would be kept away by the storm.

"Quite an assemblage of nations, I declare!" she exclaimed to Madame Vernon, when at last there was nothing to trouble her but the suspicion that her maid might fall down and break all her best china when she brought in the tray. "French, English, American, and we may say Irish, when we remember your birth."

The two ladies smiled, with a sense of being decidedly cosmopolitan, even if they were obliged to live in the depths of the country, and surveyed the strangers critically. Austen Temple was a pleasing specimen of English youth, which is seldom anything else. Tall, well built, with fair hair and clean features, if not handsome, he was as good, even better. He wore his clothes so that the observer forgot that he was well dressed until asked, when he invariably answered, Yes. His manners were free from all embarrassment, even when he was in the present awkward predicament of speaking little and understanding less of the tongue spoken about him.

Grafton took a fancy to him at once; there was something honest and manly in him that attracted the older man. They soon began an animated discussion of various sports, Suzette having assured them that she could be a sharer of their confidences. Indeed, thanks to her visits in Dublin, she spoke English well, with a droll Irish accent.

"Is it correct to let the young people talk together when we understand nothing?" asked mademoiselle, smiling sympathetically from her

corner by the fire, opposite Madame Vernon, although she had not the least idea what had produced the merry laugh from the other end of the room.

"Oh yes; foreigners, you know, are different. Suzette is always to be counted on, too."

So the tales of ball and boat went on until mademoiselle's final fears were removed by the safe disposal of the heavily loaded tray on the table in the middle of the room, and Suzette was called to do the honors.

It was all right. The bottles of white sparkling wine; the smaller decanter of sweet Spanish port, thick as a liqueur, which is treasured by many a country householder in Touraine; the glass dishes of preserves, made from the fruits in the presbytery orchard; the cakes, sugared and dry; everything calculated to create dyspepsia and destroy an appetite for dinner was as she had arranged it, and the hospitable dame threw back her pink cap ribbons, and drew a long sigh of relief, as she saw her guests partaking of her feast. It was partly kindness, but a good deal the vigorous hunger one always feels in that part of France, which made the young men do their share nobly. When at last even mademoiselle's pressing invitations could not induce them to eat another mouthful, and the maid had been summoned and had removed the tray, much lighter than when she brought it in; when the hostess had listened nervously for a crash which did not come, — then, and not till then, did she

apply herself to the mental entertainment of her guests. Her mind free from care, she settled comfortably in her chair, and addressed Grafton.

"You must believe that my brother and I take a great interest in you," she began kindly. "If you want advice of any kind, come here, for monsieur le curé is very wise, and can always advise wonderfully, and I can make capital bandages and mustard plasters. My *tisanes* are called good, too."

"You are very kind, mademoiselle, but I trust I shall not need to trouble you. I would rather come to you with whole bones than with broken ones."

"Ah, one can never tell. Young men are so heedless. Besides, I have heard something that makes me sure you are not very wise regarding your health."

"And that is?"

"That I learn you take a cold bath every morning. Is that true?"

"Is that such a dangerous thing to do?" asked Grafton, laughing, more at Temple's incredulous stare of surprise than at her question, which was not put to him for the first time.

"Dangerous? *Dangerous?* Where and how were you brought up, monsieur?"

"In Boston, by — well, by several females, my mother at their head."

"And what would they say now, if they knew your reckless habits?"

"Probably that they would have been pleased if I had shown a disposition to like water when I was under their care. I remember some battles royal on the subject of baths in those days."

"Now I want you to pay attention to me, and translate as I go on to Monsieur Temple" —

"Oh, I say, I understand straight enough; it 's the talking I can't manage yet," interrupted Temple.

"Then I shall speak very slowly, for I saw that you also had brought a tub here. I don't want him to think that it 's the trouble of carrying up water to his room," she went on, with a sudden acceleration of speech, turning to the others in the group, — "it 's not that, but it really goes to my heart to see two young men, so strong and healthy, preparing their tombs as fast as if they had spades in their hands. I know it 's the fashion of the present generation to think that we old ones are not worth listening to."

"Oh no, mademoiselle," interposed Suzette.

"Oh yes, my dear; I know, I know. But if you 'll hear me out, you shall be convinced that I know something. In my youth I had a cousin; poor fellow, he was consumptive from a child. Well, he had the habit of taking baths, and he was not forty when he died."

Mademoiselle threw back her cap-strings, and looked about her as if the convincing end of her ghastly tale needed no further remarks.

"It was very sad," said Grafton gravely.

"Very. I 'm glad you see how right I am. I understand that millions of Englishmen are carried off by consumption, brought on by taking baths, every year. The census is something alarming. Thank Heaven, we French are not addicted to such foolishness."

"Some of us are," said Suzette, trying not to laugh.

"Then it 's this disease my brother calls the end of the century; he says that even the peasants have caught it, and that things change each month."

"For the better, let 's hope," said Grafton lightly, a remark which would have met with a smart denial if the door had not opened at that moment, admitting the curé. He greeted his sister's guests with the lofty politeness peculiar to him, seeming to imply that his low bow and courtly manner were assumed as a garment, and that the man behind was superior to all those about him. Madame Vernon rose, and thanked him for his welcome with a fluttered air; Suzette made her curtsy gravely, with not a faint indication of cordiality; then the curé turned to Grafton, with whom he shook hands, and expressed the pleasure he felt in seeing him in his house. Mademoiselle kept her round blue eyes fixed on her brother's form with an admiring wonder in them; then, before the last word had passed his lips, she broke in to ask if he would have anything to eat or drink; she was so sorry they had not waited; but the

maid was close at hand; the tray could be set in a moment, although some one had spilt a little port on the cloth, but really, as long as it had been quite fresh when they came, what did a trifle like that signify?

The curé pressed the tips of his fingers together, raised his eyebrows until they resembled two inverted V's, and gave her a look so expressive of resigned patience that she broke off in the middle of her chatter, and became suddenly silent. Then he spoke with an exaggerated humility that made Grafton return sympathetically a look of quick anger that shot from Suzette's eyes.

"If you have said all that is necessary, my dear sister, I will venture to ask for a cup of that excellent tea that Madame Vernon gave me."

"Are you ill — suffering, monsieur le curé?" demanded mademoiselle, with an anxious look.

"No, not exactly, but I have been wet and tired; parish matters kept me out in the tempest," he added for the benefit of the young men.

The maid was summoned, and orders given how to prepare a fresh tray for the concoction, while the curé gave to Temple and Grafton a pressing invitation from the baron to call at the château.

"Why does n't the beggar come to see us first?" asked Temple rather indignantly.

"Because it 's not the custom here," said Grafton; "you ought to go there; his wife is one of the Paris leaders, and can give you pointers for your career. As for me," he added in French to the

curé, "I am here for work, you know, not society. You will be very kind if you express my thanks and so on to Monsieur Ernst, and tell him that I 'm a bird of passage."

"I hope that we may induce you to reconsider that idea," said the curé politely. "Of course the inmates of the château might not be a temptation to you to desert your art, but there is a gallery of excellent paintings, among them a famous Clouet, which may shake your hermit-like fancies."

Grafton's face lighted up. "Ah," he said, "that 's another thing. Temple, I 'll go with you, if you like, to-morrow."

The curé was satisfied, and turned away to mademoiselle, who was beginning to make his tea. If there was one thing which made the poor little soul more nervous than another, it was to be watched by her brother's hawkish eyes while she was engaged in any duty. So now, as he stood close over her while she tried to light the spirit-lamp to boil the water, her fingers got mixed up, she could not light the match, her loose sleeve, cut in the fashion of long ago, caught the handle of the water-jug, and nearly tipped it over, while her cheeks grew crimson with agitation.

"He knows just how hateful he is," thought Suzette indignantly, as she deftly rescued mademoiselle's sleeve, and shifted the burden of responsibility on to her own shoulders. Grafton noticed her kindly act, and admired the clean decision of her movements. There was nothing muddled

or confused in her prettily poised head, he was sure.

As soon as the tea was made to the taste of the man of God, Madame Vernon reminded her daughter that the calash was waiting at the gate; she made her adieu to the curé, thanked her hostess for a charming afternoon, and left the room, followed by Suzette and the other guests, who were to help them into their carriage.

"Do you do everything as prettily as you make tea?" asked Grafton, as he held an umbrella over Suzette's head on their way down the path. "I quite envied the old gentleman being so well treated."

"It was not for *him* I made it; it was for dear mademoiselle's sake. If I could, I 'd have mixed something in it to give *him* a sharp pain."

CHAPTER VIII

The following day Grafton and Temple called at the château, but found no one to receive them, and on the Saturday each of the young men was honored with the baron's card, and an invitation for dinner the next evening at eight o'clock.

Grafton was reading his note, which he had found on his return from a long walk, when Temple appeared in his room.

"The curé says we 'd much better go; he always dines there himself Sundays; it 's one of the old gentleman's feudal rights. What do you say?"

"Oh, let 's go. It can't interfere with my work, and I want to see the pictures."

"What are you going to wear? Do these Frenchies sport the proper togs?"

Grafton hesitated; the habit of dressing for dinner is much less common in France than in the United States or in England, and there is no subject so deeply important to a man as this same question of suitable dress. The two foreigners threw themselves heart and soul into the *pros* and *cons* of the matter, at last deciding on the regulation costume, modified by a black cravat. The next evening when they presented themselves at the château, they found that they need not have

felt such severe pangs of indecision, as the marquis was in a simple gray suit, while the baron shone so resplendently in all the glories of tucked and ruffled shirt-front that he brought the credit of the family to a proper level. As they stood waiting for their hostess, who had not yet appeared, Grafton recalled one of his mother's parting injunctions to him. She had said, with all her soul in her eyes, "My dear boy, never forget one thing; promise me to keep my words in your mind as solemnly as if they were the last I ever spoke. *Always*, *always* take your evening clothes in your trunk, no matter if you visit the North Pole, for they mark the true gentleman."

The baron turned from one guest to the other, trying to make talk, and conceal his nervousness. His little plan would miss fire at the very first should Diane take it into her head not to appear, which was quite possible, as the party was her husband's.

But Beaulieu was not Paris, and the fortnight that she had spent there had been very long; so that, just as the butler threw open the doors at one end of the long hall, she entered at the other. Quite unconcerned that she was late, she walked slowly down the vista, her head held high, catching the glow of the sunset as she passed one window after another. She wore a marvelous gown of black and white, which she called mourning for aunt Amélie. With her slight, supple figure, her perfect appointments, and even the little sway of

her walk, she seemed the very embodiment of her century — of her decade. Modern, from the black aigrette with its diamond clasp in her blonde hair to the tip of her narrow slipper, — so modern that she seemed out of place in the grim château.

Her mood this evening was graciousness, and she gave a charming welcome to the two strangers, although she passed by the curé, noticing his low bow with only a careless nod.

"Etiquette is crushing me," she began gayly. "Who is to have the honor of taking me in to dinner? I think," she went on, answering herself, "that Monsieur Temple shall give me his arm as we go in, being the representative of the older nation, and Monsieur Blake as we come out, being our ancient friend and ally."

Although Temple was at her right, his inability to speak French easily made her conversation at first almost entirely addressed to Grafton.

"You are an artist, I hear; an impressionist?" she began at once.

"I am not old enough to be christened, madame."

"I was going to say that if you were I would do my best to provoke my husband to such a point that he would beat me, and then, when I was quite streaked with gay colors, I would offer myself to you as a model."

"And is there no hope of that fortunate event? Fortunate for me, I mean."

"No, I am afraid not; you see, Monsieur Ernst is, sadly enough, a pattern husband."

"You spoke to me?" asked Félix, catching his name.

"No, my dear; only of you. I was enlarging on your perfection as a family man, and a Christian."

Diane's voice was so very dry as she said this that her father looked up reproachfully. An awkward little silence followed, broken by her.

"In America are the women as petted and adored as they would have us believe?" she asked.

"I think women have an awfully pleasant position with us," replied Grafton. "I should say that as a rule they are very happy. But I suppose a great deal of that is due to our system of marriage," he went on, ignorant that he was skimming over very thin ice.

"Oh yes; you are supposed to marry for love, are n't you?"

"That is our theory."

"And does the love go on after they are married?"

"Sometimes it does; sometimes it does n't."

"It must be a very strange sensation to be in love — with your own husband. They can't have any forbidden-fruit sort of fun," she added with conviction. Then, suddenly turning, she addressed Félix.

"What is the matter? You hardly speak tonight. I have n't heard you tell any one how much the wine cost, and I feel as if the caviare had been forgotten."

"Caviare is unnecessary when we can listen to your remarks," was the baron's retort.

Grafton felt uncomfortable, and thought with longing of his quiet room at the inn. This sparring struck him as ill-bred, and most unpleasant. But in another moment Diane turned to him again.

"Tell me some details about your queer establishments. When people like one another, what do they do? They can't want to go much into society."

"No; I fancy that when they are happy, they find home the best place."

"Then I hope things will be evened up in the next world," she said, lowering her voice so that the others, who at last had begun to talk, could not hear. "If they have found Paradise here, and it seems to mean that, it will be unjust for them to share with us, who have found life — well, *not* Paradise."

There was real feeling in her voice, although she finished with a thin little laugh that had no mirth in it. When she spoke again it was to ask Grafton how he liked the château.

"Outside it is superb," he answered with conviction. "But I cannot give any opinion yet of the interior, for I have hardly seen it."

"You have seen enough, perhaps, to agree with me that he has ruined it," she said, with just a glance towards the baron. "It is all perfect, and that is the trouble with it. Before it was improved it was so much better. Now it is a fine museum,

all the furniture in keeping with the epoch when it was chiefly built. As if it were not absurd to think that a family could live in a house for five hundred years, as we have here, and keep the same chairs, and tables, and hangings!"

"It is all very well done," he replied, seeing what she meant.

"Yes, you have found the word; it is done, it didn't grow, as it should have. Ah, I know you would have loved it in spite of its shabbiness if you could have seen it when I lived here."

"Don't you live here now?"

"No, I only belong here because I have the proper name to admit me."

"How did it look?"

"It didn't look, because it was. There was one salon that the marquise in the time of Louis XIV. had furnished according to the taste then, — bad taste, if you like, but telling a story; and so on, up and down the centuries, each châtelaine setting her seal on the dear old place, until my turn came, and I shall leave nothing to it, nothing."

In spite of his disapproval of her treatment of her husband, which had displeased Grafton, it was so in contrast with what the baroness should have said and done from an ideal point of view, she interested him, and he was sorry when she devoted herself to Temple, leaving him to talk with the marquis. He found this rather difficult. The old gentleman was a courtly, kindly soul, but he lived so far back that he could not treat an artist as an

equal, any more than he could the curé, to whom he was quite genial, but addressed in a way that kindly people use towards their servants. He was encased in prejudices as completely as his ancestors had been in armor. He proving quite impossible as a conversationalist, Grafton amused himself with studying the different types gathered about the dainty, well-appointed table. The young Englishman, who regarded it all from a vantage-ground of national superiority, making mental notes of how "these people" ate, and drank, and behaved; the curé, quiet, with an air of false humility, watching everything with his keen, penetrating eyes; the baron, not quite at his ease, somewhat overdoing his duty as a host at times, at others relapsing into a preoccupied state, apparently ignorant of what was going on about him, so that his father-in-law was obliged more than once to call his attention to the servant waiting at his elbow; the marquis, with his proud, melancholy reserve; and, lastly, the hostess. Again and again Grafton found himself studying her; there was something fascinating about her in spite of her occasional breaks. She seemed the embodiment of modernity, with its restlessness, its craving for novelty, its rawness, its want of harmony. Crude, because time has not been given for mellowing, and at the same time polished by the knowledge of the centuries that have gone before. The meal itself interested him; everything was of the best, the decorations were in excellent taste,

and the service perfect. But he missed something that is noticeable, as a rule, in French dinners, a note of individuality, as if the hostess had put some of her own personality into the ordering of the dishes, and the arrangement of flowers and fruit; here it gave a vague impression of being all turned out by machinery.

When Diane made the move to leave the table Grafton gave her his arm, and she led him to another part of the château from the one he had seen.

"Don't you think it a great pity that I am not dressed in a high, peaked cap-like arrangement on my head, with long, turned-up shoes, and all the rest of middle-age fashions? I seem out of harmony here, do I not?"

"It is not fair to ask me that when your gown is what it is. How can I say anything, but that it is perfect?"

"It is pretty; it was my own idea. I saw one of those magpies in the garden the other day (Diane de Poitiers' souls, I call the thieving things), and it struck me that a dress would be delicious just like one; so I had the gamekeeper shoot one for me; I sent it to my dressmaker in Paris, and this is the result."

At this moment the baron, hearing some mention of shooting, came up.

"Are you fond of shooting, monsieur?" he asked politely.

"No, I must confess to being quite ignorant of the sport, although I am fond of all others," replied Grafton.

"That is a pity, for I can offer you some very fair shooting in September. I have lately bought a very large preserve towards the eastern boundary of the estate. But you will care for the stag hunts?"

"I came to the Silver Crescent for ten days, to make a study that pleased me, but I find work ahead for nearly a month, and now, if you hold out such inducements for the autumn, I may never go back to Paris."

"You have not yet seen my picture-gallery; do you care to give it a look?"

"With much pleasure," replied Grafton, wondering how he could see the paintings in the dim light of the candles, which alone burned in the large rooms, even their profusion of numbers failing to produce any very great brilliancy, although the effect was charming. But, on reaching the gallery, he found it filled with the clearness of day, the source of which was cunningly hidden. The place was much changed since the windy March night when the marquis had shown his ancestors to Félix by the dim light of the lamp held in his hand. The portraits had all been cleaned and put in order by the best of Parisian art; the tattered hangings had been replaced by a subdued background of some plain, unfigured material, which brought out the tones of the pictures. It was immensely improved, but the touch of romance was not so prominent.

Grafton was sincerely interested in the few really good specimens, and found the Clouet superb.

"Would you care to copy it?" asked his host. "It would fill up a rainy morning or so, when you are not sketching."

"It would fill up more than that," replied Grafton. "I thank you for your offer, monsieur, and I do not promise not to take advantage of it."

"Do you paint portraits?"

"Only for the purpose of studies; I am still a student."

"It struck me to-night that my wife would be a pretty subject in the dress she has on."

"Exquisite; no artist could want a better."

"You would not care to fill your idle hours by trying your hand at a likeness of her? It would make you feel that your holiday had an excuse for being prolonged."

"Thanks," replied Grafton carelessly; "you are very good, but I am working with a definite object in view this summer, and I don't care to scatter my energies."

The baron led the way back to the drawing-room, wishing this young, good-looking foreigner were not so confoundedly well off as to make the matter of a thousand francs or so evidently of no importance to him.

They found Diane teaching the budding diplomatist French slang, and laughing merrily at the scowl with which the curé regarded her attempts to undermine his influence.

"You must not think that your tutor is always right," she said slowly and impressively. "You

understand me? Good. Monsieur le curé talks excellent French, but it is of the epoch of Louis XIV., and if you copy him, it will sound in French as it would in English if you talked like your poet Milton."

"With your permission, I will leave Monsieur Temple to come home with Monsieur Blake," said the curé in a severe tone.

"Oh, there is no need for so much ceremony; you always have my leave to go," said Diane, puffing a little ring of smoke in his direction. And as he bowed low in answer, and then turned away, she added between her teeth closed over her cigarette, so that it was doubtful if he heard, "I think our little proverb that warns you to keep your house free of cats and priests is far from useless."

"You are not fond of the clerical party, madame?" asked Grafton, beginning to smoke, too.

"Not nowadays, they are too pushing; there is nothing holy about that old hypocrite but his garments. Papa has gone to his own room, so I can say it, — I don't tell him what I think because it hurts him; and as a rule I don't say it to any one, for it is not at all smart not to be devout. But you know," she went on with a sarcastic smile, "we French are famed for our economy, and it hurts my ideas of the proportion of things to have too much religion in one family. My husband does enough to save all his own soul and some of mine."

The baron, who had gone out of the room with the curé, here returned, and the conversation again reverted to shooting.

"You are a good shot?" asked Grafton. The subject did not interest him, and Diane did, but after all he was bound to be polite to his host.

"Monsieur Ernst is a capital shot in one line," interposed his wife. "He can sit for hours at a time shooting larks fluttering about a turning mirror; it suits him perfectly, for it requires neither skill nor exertion."

Grafton was forced to admire the manner in which the baron kept his temper, for the remark deserved a sharp reply; but he tactfully changed the subject, and after a little more desultory talk the two guests took their leave.

"You will come soon again, and tell me more about home life and the States?" said Diane to Grafton.

"With great pleasure, madame."

There was a brilliant moon, and as Grafton and Temple walked down the avenue, the leaves of the great laurel bushes glittered as if made of polished steel, and the pointed shadows of the château towers lay black and sharply outlined on the lawn, bringing lurking memories and suggestions of Louis XI., in whose time they were built.

"Beautiful place," said Grafton.

"Yes, not half nasty; but what an extraordinary pair the baron and baroness are."

"They don't seem to pull well together."

"She is deuced pretty and *chic;* I am going to study French with her. I have made up my mind not to waste much time with the old gentleman."

"She is pretty, and quite up to date, I should say."

"Ah, I believe you! I am going in for a regular flirt with her."

"You may not find it as easy as it looks," said Grafton, a trifle annoyed at the superior tone of the young man.

"Oh, these French women, they 're fair game for anything," responded Temple.

Grafton thought of the specimens he had seen at his cousin's, and smiled a little grimly as he wished to himself that he could see his companion attempting to trifle with their young affections, but he kept his observations to himself, and, as they reached the inn, asked Temple to come up to his room for a pipe and a glass of brandy and water. The invitation was accepted with alacrity, and they entered together.

"We 'll have some hot water," said Grafton. "I see that my landlady is still up, and her servant, too, for there were two shadows on the curtain."

Instead of going directly to the turning stairs, Grafton opened the door into the main room. Madame Richer was standing in the centre of the floor with an expectant air, and just as Grafton put his head in he saw a black skirt vanish into the kitchen beyond.

"May Jean bring me up a pitcher of boiling water, madame?"

"I will, monsieur, if monsieur will have the kindness to wait a moment; Jean has gone to bed."

"Thanks," said Grafton, and left her, thinking no more of the matter.

He found his lamp lighted, and Paddy quivering with the joy caused by the sound of his master's steps. When the hot water shortly appeared, the room was already misty with the smoke of two pipes, and the conversation had wandered from all such minor matters as women, and race characteristics, to the absorbing topic of rowing.

"Is your landlady always as white as that?" asked Temple, stopping a moment in a heated argument regarding swivel rowlocks.

"I did n't notice her to-night; was she pale?" replied Grafton, unscrewing a flask.

"Looked like a ghost, or as if she had seen one."

"As a rule she has a good color. How much, old fellow?"

The truth was that Madame Richer *had* seen a ghost that evening; the ghost of a past that she had hoped was forever laid. Ah, those spectres of wrongs done! Repentance and steadfast endeavor may cleanse the soul, and make the future pure and honest; but the wrong once done is done for all time, and happy is he who has no need to quail before the glance of its hollow eyes.

That evening the landlady was seated cosily in

her kitchen lined with rows upon rows of copper saucepans, each one shining like gold. The lamp burned brightly, the big cat purred contentedly at her feet, and as she knit steadily, sending a careful glance now and then through the glass door to the other room where three peasants were playing billiards, her thoughts were of a pleasant nature. Her vines, thriftily replenished four years before, were beginning to show good results, and she counted on a comfortable sum from the coming vintage. Her visitor had agreed to pay her well, and now that he had been invited to dine at the château, any lingering doubts, caused by the fact that he was a foreigner, dispelled. The past was past; no one except the curé knew the secret of it, and for the first time since her early youth, Berthe Richer dared to plan cheerfully for the future.

Tap, tap, went a cue on the floor, and rolling up her work, the landlady obeyed its summons, entered the outer room, took the carefully calculated sous owed her for red wine and the use of her table by the men in blue blouses, said good-night to them, and began to prepare to go to bed. First she covered the billiard-table with a large cloth; then gathering the empty glasses together, she took them into the kitchen to wash them. This done, she returned to put out the lamps. Grafton had told her not to wait up for him, and she was glad he had a key, for she had been busy since dawn, and she was sleepy. It was with her

mouth wide open in an unconstrained yawn that she walked to the hanging-lamp fixture, one arm lifted to pull it down so that she might blow out the lights. As she advanced she heard a slight sound, and, turning suddenly, saw, seated at the same table where Grafton had ordered his glass of vermuth, the austere figure of the curé.

"Ah!" she said, gasping a little with fright. Then recovering herself, she dropped a curtsy, and asked politely but distantly what he might wish.

"A word with you, my good woman. Sit down so I may speak low."

Begging his pardon for her boldness, she seated herself on the very edge of a chair near him; indeed her legs were trembling so that to stand would have been difficult.

"I have had news of your unfortunate son," he began abruptly.

"Oh, the poor lad; that means he is in trouble."

"Yes; he is in hiding."

The mother did not cry. She crumpled her apron with shaking fingers, and fixed her eyes piteously on the priest's face.

"Always the same thing?" she asked.

"Always the same thing. This time he was taken with the game in his hand. He knocked down with a large stick the keeper who discovered him, injuring him severely, and then disappeared."

"He can't help it; it 's in his blood," she said,

with the dead tone of a fatalist. "He has his father's nature."

There was a short pause, during which she seemed to see in a clearer light the extent of her misfortune, for suddenly she burst out in a different tone.

"It is unjust! It is wicked! Just because his father was a gentleman he was praised for his skill in the chase, and his love for it was called something fine; and my poor boy is an outcast because he, too, is full of life and spirit. Ah, his father was a hunter — a cruel hunter, not only of wild beasts, but of human beings! He had the desire to conquer every creature that came in his way!"

"Be calm, my good soul, be calm," said the curé soothingly.

But she threw him a glance of scorn for advising the impossible, and went on, —

"You tell me to be calm. Would you be calm if the one being in the world you loved, the one thing you could call yours, was an outcast, homeless, hiding, hungry, perhaps? Ah, you men, how I hate you all! You think we are like beasts of burden, and in your hearts blame the Lord who gave us tongues."

The curé waited until she had stopped, and then, using a tone of authority which cowed her for the time, said, —

"I have come to tell you that if it is possible I will once more aid René to live a decent life. But you must remember that I am completely master

of your secret; I am the only one who knows your past, and who could tell the whole village that the late Monsieur Richer never lived."

"Oh, for God's sake, hush!"

"There is no one who can hear us; but you will consider how terrible a thing it is that one little word from me could cast you down from the respectable position you hold here in our midst. Think for a moment what you should owe me for my silence."

"Monsieur le curé is all that is good," she answered, but her tone was sullen, and in her heart she thought, "He wants to use me."

Her instinct was correct. In the next sentence he unfolded his wishes to her reluctant ears.

"Watch Monsieur Blake? Spy on him?" she exclaimed. "I don't want to. He is kind, and he is going to pay me well."

"My good woman, there is great reason to suspect that he is not here for painting at all. It is not a question as to what you want to do; it is what you *must* do; you understand me?"

"Yes, monsieur le curé; I am not stupid; I understand," she replied in the same unwilling way.

"And the money that you will gain, if you are able to give me any information of importance about him, will send your unhappy son across the seas where he will find a good home, and be no further trouble to you."

"After all, he is a stranger; it is not the same as if he was French."

"Of course not. Remember, I depend on you for an account of what he does every day. And in the mean time I will occupy myself regarding" —

"'Sh! He is coming," interrupted Madame Richer.

The curé glided into the kitchen, and the same moment Grafton's head was thrust into the room.

CHAPTER IX

The days passed by in regal procession, each bearing its gift. Spring gave way to summer, and still Grafton lingered on at the Silver Crescent. The little hamlet, which had seemed so insignificant at first sight, now took on serious proportions. The diligence that ran through the village twice a week, stopping at the inn, marked an event of some importance; as for market day, that was a date to calculate to and from.

Gradually the old room, remnant of a past prosperity, took on the character of its occupant. Books were scattered over the tables; photographs of the historic château in the neighborhood were nailed on the walls; a pair of oars stood in one corner, and pipes, boxes of cigars, and packages of matches that would n't light, being government made, lay on the books or under them as fate willed it. The curious effect of the Touraine climate had asserted itself on Grafton after the first few weeks; a sensation of great mental activity, combined with a disinclination for physical activity. Temple succumbed to it, too, and the oars were seldom taken from their resting-place.

Both the young men were a great deal at the château, where Diane made them welcome. She

had kept the promise provoked from her by her husband, and had stayed at home all these months, although she had received many invitations. She was a creature of moods, and enjoyed the freedom of her own house so that she might indulge in them. Sometimes the wondering peasants would see her skillfully guiding her four-in-hand through the narrow village road, her guard making all the noise possible to be extracted from his horn. Sometimes she would return to the habits of her girlhood, and ride soberly by her father's side to his deep content. Again days would pass when she would not set her foot outside the park limits, but spend hours with a book in her hand smoking numberless cigarettes. But, strange to say, she was not bored; her expression had an alertness that comes from some engrossing thought or occupation, leaving no room for ennui.

One warm August afternoon she was sitting with Grafton and Temple under some large trees that stood on the lawn before the château. They had both breakfasted with her, and when the coffee had been served out of doors there had been some suggestion of tennis, which had given Monsieur de Beaulieu an excuse to take himself off. He could not understand Diane's fancy for these foreigners, but he felt that he was too far behind modern ideas to remonstrate; if her husband did not object, why should he? And Félix evidently did not object, for of late he had been in the best of spirits whenever he had shown himself at Beaulieu, and

he knew how constantly both Blake and Temple were with his wife.

The young Englishman, who had picked up French remarkably fast, had been telling Diane of some hunting experience, which was long and complicated. She had listened attentively, but with an occasional glance at Grafton, who was leaning back in his chair with his eyes fixed on the low hanging masses of clouds lazily drifting across the deep blue of the sky, seeming actually to drop fatness as they went; he was dreamily picturing to himself how their shadows were creeping over the glistening gold of the grain-fields on the uplands, and the shining green of the dark, polished leaves of the walnut-trees that are scattered among the corn. And then his mind took a sudden turn, and he wondered if Suzette would wear a buff linen dress this afternoon fastened about her round waist with a brown ribbon; he had praised it the last time that she had worn it, and he was expected at the Vernons' later in the day.

"A penny for your thoughts," said Diane, tossing a crimson rose at him, when Temple's story had come to a successful finish.

"I know what he was thinking of," said Temple. "It 's not worth half so much money as that."

"I don't believe you do know," returned Grafton, "for what I happened to be thinking of at that moment is worth more pounds than either you or I have."

"It was how much purple madder and crimson

ochre would be necessary to paint that sky," said Temple promptly.

"Wrong," said Grafton.

"Now it 's my turn," broke in Diane. "He was thinking how infinitely superior his countrywomen are to French women. Is n't that so?"

"No; both wrong. I wish I had made a bet on it."

"But you do think that of us as compared with American women, don't you?" persisted Diane.

"Do you want a serious answer, or are you in fun?"

"No, I 'm not chaffing; I 'd really like to know."

"I 'm off to the tennis court to practice serving, if you 're by way of talking such rot as that," remarked Temple, strolling off to the tennis court, a few hundred yards away.

"Then my answer depends on what class of women you mean," said Grafton. "If you are talking of your sort, I have one opinion; if of the peasants, I have another."

"We 'll begin at the peasants then; of course you think your peasant a much finer animal."

"No, I don't. As a boy I was taught that women in Europe were treated as beasts of burden and made to work like oxen in the fields. That has a very shocking sound, but since I have lived among them, and seen their charming manners, their civility without servility, I have changed my mind. What they do is not degrading, for in the doing they dignify the labor."

"It sounds funny to hear you speak of manners and dignity in connection with the old hags who carry bundles of weeds on their backs," said Diane a little mockingly.

"It may sound so, but I assure you I have seen an immense amount of grace among those very 'old hags.'"

"How would your free and equal people like your remarks?"

"Probably not at all. But if they could see themselves in contrast with the women here, they would cut up their sewing-machines for kindling wood and gladly give up their indoor life to gain the freshness and health of your people."

"Now redeem your patriotism by finding something wrong with our upper classes."

As Diane said this she rested her head on the back of her chair, and threw a long look into Grafton's eyes through her black lashes. It was a challenge on her side, a direct bid for a compliment, if not for something more. But Grafton was in no mood for making love, at least not to his pretty hostess; he rather took pleasure in telling the truth according to his ideas, without disguise.

Accordingly he answered her last remark: —

"That is not hard to do; your class of women don't compare for one moment with our corresponding class."

Diane sat bolt upright in her astonishment: —

"You 're in fun! You don't mean that?"

"Indeed I do."

"Then it 's a great shame that some of your best specimens are not more common over here. I assure you that no Frenchman would dream of marrying an American girl unless she had heaps of money."

"We keep our nicest women like our richest mines for home consumption; the most desirable are seldom quoted in foreign markets," said Grafton lazily, enjoying her unconcealed pique.

"I don't believe you know how to appreciate a really fascinating woman any more than you can understand good wines; you are too new a people; you can't understand fineness of detail; you want a big taste that burns all the way down."

What man can stand being told he is deficient in taste? Even an anchorite might be excused for rising from his knees, and flagellating with his rosary any one who told him that he could not distinguish the spring water from the lake water. So Grafton roused at this hit.

"We won't bring wine into this discussion; it is too vast a subject. But as to women" —

"Being a more limited and less exciting subject," interpolated Diane.

"As to women, I 'll tell you exactly what I mean. With us a girl of moderate intelligence does not finish her education with her school life. She comes into the world with her mind open, ready to receive new impressions; she knows what is going on in foreign countries; she reads. We have no index which forbids every book that throws

light on science, or introduces new thoughts, allowing filthy literature to be read everywhere, high and low."

"You 've been getting your ideas from Zola's 'Rome,'" said Diane, with a little shrug of scorn.

"Oh, if you don't give me credit even for original thought, it is useless for me to go on talking."

It was Grafton's turn to be nettled.

"No; I didn't mean that; you are very interesting, — go on." Diane had regained her temper as he lost his. "I want some of your opinions of our literature; they will be original doubtless."

"They won't be diffuse; the modern French novel is firstly nasty, secondly dull."

"Dull? Oh, come now! You 're going too far. That 's comical. How about French style?"

"It 's perfect; so perfect that you begin by being interested, and in the midst of your admiration you stumble over the same old air with its nine thousandth variation. Always the same thing — deception, deception, not to call it by an uglier name."

"We like our novels spicy; your moral books lack salt."

"It 's not only their immorality, it 's their utter want of morality I complain of. Granted that your heroine is going to sin any way, is n't it more exciting to give her a conscience to struggle against, instead of the purblind husband, or the wholly blind first lover, to be taken in for the benefit of the second or the tenth?"

"Your eternal Anglo-Saxon conscience! Poor thing, how tired it must get."

"It 's all very well to laugh at it, but it is what makes our women the fine, noble creatures they are. Don't you imagine a man has more admiration, more respect for a woman whose mind is filled with interesting ideas, — schemes for helping the world to be a better place than it is, — I don't mean making petticoats for poor babies, or selling things at a bazaar, but taking an active part in the institutions of her State, the prisons, the hospitals? Can't you see why we place women of that sort on a pedestal, as you are always saying, and pay them the respect they deserve?"

"Respect?" exclaimed Diane. "Do you want your game to have such a dull attribute as that? For you are all alike, you men; we are nothing but game to you, and your one idea is to hunt us."

"Oh, we speak a different language, not of words, but of thoughts," cried Grafton, standing up. "How can a man love a woman whom he does not respect in the best sense? How can he feel that she is his true complement? That she will keep his ideals high and pure? That she will soften his hard qualities? That she can go hand in hand with him through life, helping him by her dependence on him, making him do his best to be true and brave and tender, a true gentleman? That is what *respect* does!"

He was stirred as he spoke; Suzette's image had crept into his mind.

Diane looked at him keenly, admiring his energetic movements, so virile without being rough, the animation of his expression, the deep glow in his eyes. But she noticed with a puzzled chagrin that while he talked he hardly glanced towards her; he had become almost unconscious of her presence. She had allowed her pretty foot to creep out from the lace of her petticoat, encased in a dainty shoe, the silk stocking clinging tight about her round, slim ankle, but he paid no more attention to it than if it had been that of a clodhopper. She became impatient, and more eager to gain a point.

"You must n't be hard on those who have not had the advantages of an American training."

"Hard? I did n't mean to be hard on any one. You started me on a topic that is very interesting to me, and I let myself go; that 's all. Please don't think there was anything personal in what I said."

"But if I choose to make it personal?"

She raised her eyebrows and threw a wistful look into her face. She *would* stir him in some way.

"That is the ruin of all discussion; the moment it becomes personal, feelings are hurt."

"And if a woman chooses to take the pain if she is to be improved by it? That is her lookout."

"If she does that she has made a bid for the highest pedestal of the lot," said Grafton lightly, hating to be forced into the position of an ethical instructor.

"Then go on; tell me some more home truths, and help me climb to my pedestal."

Her voice was more speaking than her words, and her eyes the most eloquent of all. To reply as she evidently wished him to, meant launching into a sea of flirtation; to refrain was to be somewhat priggish, and Grafton was immoderately relieved when Temple's voice came in welcome interruption.

"Did you see that, Blake?"

"No; what was it?"

"The prettiest cut you ever saw bar none," said Temple strolling back. "Renshawe was n't in it. It 's hot there in the sun; you 're better off here."

"Is that half past three?" asked Grafton, as a solitary stroke sounded from the church clock. "By Jove, it is," he added, looking at his watch, "and I must be off."

"No; stay to tea, and then we 'll go to drive later when it 's cool."

As Diane said this she gave him a long, slow look from her sea-colored eyes; a look that spoke louder than words; that seemed to say, "After what I said just now you *must* do as I wish."

Temple displayed no diplomacy in hiding the anxiety with which he waited for Grafton's reply, and drew a long breath of relief when he said, —

"Really I can't; I 'm sorry, but I must practice what I preach, and my work can't be neglected for pleasure."

"I don't believe that Blake paints at all," broke in Temple. "My notion is that he 's writing a book of French Impressions, to answer 'Outre

Mer,' and I know just what he will say in his writing to-day, — or at least what I should if I were fool enough to be an author. 'The women of the French nobility are the most charming in the world, and dress in hot weather in lovely white stuffs that look like the lather one makes for shaving.'"

"O wretch! to call my valenciennes ruffles names like that! You deserve to marry a laundress," interrupted Diane turning towards him, and for a moment ignoring Grafton, who stood with one hand held out, preparatory to taking his leave. Then, looking over her shoulder with an exaggerated expression of wonder, as if she wished him to think that he was already forgotten, she added: —

"Good-by, monsieur, since your work is so important."

As he walked slowly down the avenue he heard her laughing with Temple, and unconsciously contrasted it with Suzette's contagious laughter; in Diane's there was not much suggestion of mirth.

"She must be awfully unhappy, poor creature," he thought, "and I must have acted like a beastly prig to make her say that about my respecting her."

Her eyes haunted him as he returned to the inn and called Paddy to go with him to Monsieur Vernon's. That old well in the corner had never run dry as a subject for a sketch; in short it had proved a most difficult and stimulating bit of still

life. Following the example of a celebrated artist of his day, Grafton decided to make the well go through its paces in every possible manner and light, and his portfolio looked like the embodiment of an Englishman's idea of Yankee conversation: "Well! Well! Well!" Needless to add that Grafton liked to work on the Vernon terrace. He had formed a sincere friendship for Monsieur Vernon, who hid a warm, affectionate heart beneath his mannerisms. Madame Vernon was always kind and gracious, although too much absorbed in admiring her husband to be amusing; and Suzette, — well, Grafton did not attempt to analyze his feeling for her, not being given to introspection. He only knew that he liked nothing better than to find himself in front of the gray house, his easel waiting ready, and Suzette near by, busy with some work, always doing something for others. Paddy was a privileged guest, and had promptly made himself at home from the first day, when the hole of a mouse, or some other equally exciting animal beneath the study window, had taken up his whole mind. On his subsequent visits he would patiently submit to the welcomes accorded him, being a dog of a kind nature and good manners, but, the demands of etiquette once complied with, he unequivocally showed where his heart was by frantically flying to his corner, where he scratched the gravel into a little heap and remained with his nose close to the hole. Once in a while he would give an impatient puff, but as a rule he found the

pleasures of anticipation sufficient. All of which proves that Paddy was a profound philosopher.

To-day, as Grafton drew near the gate in the high stone wall that shut in the court and garden, he heard voices, and on entering found Mademoiselle Mathilde in all the glories of a new cap enjoying an unusual gayety. In passing it may be stated that there was a second foible added to her curiosity regarding the château people of which she was frankly guilty, her mania for caps. Her neat black dresses were turned and cleansed and dyed again and again, but she rioted in extravagance as far as caps went. It was whispered that an entire closet was given up to them, but for this there is a lack of sufficient evidence. Whenever the curé went to Tours she was invited to pass the day with her friends. Although her brother was the object of her adoration, being beyond family ties the representative of Christ, for whose sake she had broken her box of ointment before him, still it must be confessed that she looked forward to his occasional absences as holidays. When he was at home his curved finger was continually suppressing her cheerful, cork-like spirits; but once the pressure removed, up bounded the cork, and floated gayly o'er the water. So, in the congenial atmosphere of the Vernon circle, she gave her agile tongue full scope, and sat with sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks, pretending to work a little, but being too busy enjoying herself to take more than one stitch in five minutes. She greeted Grafton cor-

dially, for they had become very friendly. After a few words, she reverted to the former subject of conversation, and took him into her confidence.

"I've been saying how troubled I am about Monsieur Temple," she began.

"What's wrong?" asked Grafton, wondering a little.

"Just this. You see that he is supposed to be here for lessons with monsieur le curé. Well, I must confess that he studies his task faithfully, but once done he is forever running up to the château and spends hours there, where he picks up the most extraordinary expressions I ever heard. They may be French, but I don't know what they mean."

"I don't think that I should be worried about that, for I know that Madame Ernst has been teaching him modern slang, which is not dangerous."

At the mention of Diane mademoiselle's cheeks grew pinker than before. She shook her head until the two little curls on each side of her face bobbed up and down, and then remarked inconsequently to Suzette: —

"Will you find me my handkerchief, dear child? It may be in your room where I left my bonnet."

Suzette's eyes twinkled as she took the hint and left her elders. When she had disappeared mademoiselle resumed the conversation in a deep, portentously solemn tone.

"*I* am privileged by my age, and can speak

openly of things which an unmarried woman ought never to mention until she has passed her sixtieth birthday."

"Then you must refrain from mentioning them for at least ten years more," said Grafton.

She tossed her head and murmured, "Rascal," but it was a mere aside, for she dropped the frivolous manner at once and continued: —

"That lovely young thing should never dream that such sad goings on exist as I am about to question you on. Monsieur Blake, it is very grave to watch a person grow up under your very eyes, as I watched Mademoiselle de Beaulieu, and then find that she is not all she should be."

"Grave, indeed," assented Madame Vernon.

The poet said nothing, but his countenance was expressive of ill-concealed mirth, for the only subjects on which he was unable to joke were his own fishing and versifying.

"Now," went on mademoiselle in an inquisitorial voice, "I am about to ask you a very delicate question, and I want a truthful answer. I have a right to demand it on account of the moral obligation owed by my brother to his pupil."

She allowed this profound remark to sink in, and then bending towards him came to the point with no more digressions.

"Does the baronne smoke?"

"Do you consider smoking very wicked?" asked Grafton, to put her off the scent.

"Extremely! There are not two sides to the

question. If the baronne smokes, I shall wash my hands of her — that 's all."

Grafton drew his hand down over his mouth to conceal the uncontrollable smile that the thought of Diane evoked, as she pursued her way in lofty unconsciousness of the threatened ablutions.

"And yet I am told that Spanish ladies smoke a great deal," he went on; "I mean the nicest of them."

"I never had any respect for Spanish women, or men either; it 's only what might be expected of them."

"Who was the writer," said Grafton, in a retrospective tone, "that said morality was largely a matter of climate?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know," exclaimed mademoiselle, with much energy. "He was a wicked creature, whoever he was!"

At this juncture Suzette reappeared, followed by the maid with the tea-tray, and the conversation immediately turned to the innocent topic of the weather.

Poor mademoiselle was shocked; she fell into a reverie, trying to recall the immoral remark made by Grafton, and only rallied when asked by her hostess if she would have some tea.

"No, my dear, I am quite well," she said, accepting the glass of wine which Suzette had brought her. Soon after she rose and said that it was time for her to be off. Madame Vernon offered to walk to the village with her, and having changed her

precious cap for her bonnet, and saying that her maid should be sent for the bandbox as soon as she reached home, she took rather a formal leave of Grafton, and went fluttering away. Just outside the gate she stopped short, and threw a hurt glance at her friend: —

"I don't know after all whether she smokes or not."

"Now, my dear boy, begin your work," said Monsieur Vernon, as the voices died away. "I will not interrupt you, for I am in an inspired mood, and my thoughts are flowing freely."

As he spoke he threw himself into the large chair, Suzette picked up her sewing, and Grafton opened his color-box.

For some time not a word was spoken. The light breeze rustled the leaves on the poplars by the roadside, sounding like the fall of a gentle rain; now and then a call rose from the meadows beneath as some peasant woman gathered together her cows and goats to lead them home; from a high-lying farm came the br-r-r-r of a threshing-machine which was owned by a newcomer to Amboise, and which was hired by farmers who were more enterprising than their fellows. Grafton liked to think of the purely agricultural nature of the surrounding country, unsullied by factory smoke; he found himself constantly recalling some half forgotten line of Horace that seemed to link the Latins of the past with their descendants.

Suddenly the poet began to wave his hand lan-

guidly, making long curves back and forth; then he broke the silence: —

"I have found it!" he exclaimed with enthusiasm. "The expression that I have been seeking is here."

Grafton looked up, and as if in reply to his unasked question Monsieur Vernon continued: —

"I wish to describe the gracious movements of a beautiful woman, and I have found in my inner consciousness the idea expressed thus, 'Mauve waves.' Do you catch the delicate suggestion? The tenderest of colors, the most graceful of motions. You will excuse me if I leave you to write it down? I was up at four this morning with my rod, and I was sure the words would come before night. I shall be just inside."

As he spoke he walked into the house, reappearing behind the study window under which Paddy kept his faithful watch.

"Now we can talk a little," said Suzette. "I never have half so much to say as when I am told to keep quiet."

"I should like to paint you in a cornfield in that buff gown; it would make a delicious scheme of color," said Grafton in reply. She had worn the dress that he had admired. Some consciousness of the reason for her wearing it made her blush faintly and sew vigorously. But a moment later she had let her work drop, and was watching something invisible to Grafton.

"What are you looking at?" he asked.

"The linden blossoms as they float down. There! Look! Do you see that one twirling and dancing?"

"Where? Oh, yes; it is pretty, — it has a hint of Japanese art in it."

"They always make me sad," she continued, "because they remind me of a poor old danseuse I once saw in Dublin. She had been famous in her day, but after she had given up dancing and was quite old she lost her money, and was obliged to go on the stage again. She was thin and brown, and when she skipped on her toes and waved her little arms about I saw that she was graceful, but I saw the pathos of it more than the grace."

"It is awfully sad to think of a woman old and forlorn like that."

"That memory makes me wish that this were not a linden-tree."

"Now that 's where you 're wrong," said Grafton, laying down his brush and rising. "To me one of the greatest beauties in nature is that if we look clearly at it, not putting our poor, incomplete souls into it, but seeing it just as it lies before us, fresh from God's hand, there is nothing sad or morbid in it."

"Morbid, — perhaps not; but sad! oh, it is sad! Sometimes everything is sad from the dying blossoms to dear Paddy, who is waiting there only to kill or hurt some little beast."

"I used to feel so; I am only slowly and gropingly coming out of a past that had many black

hours in it," said Grafton earnestly. "The hours of intense gloom may come back, but every day I live I feel more convinced that when we say God, we mean *Good;* the great good that overflows the world."

Suzette said nothing. Her sweet, lucent eyes had a shade of perplexity in them. Life had been opening out to her lately, and thoughts so vague that she could find no name for them had wrapped her in a soft mist that shifted from moment to moment, now shrouding her in its intangible folds, now lifting and showing her glimpses of something so ideally exquisite that she was dazzled. There were hours when she crept down to the cool, empty church, and, kneeling before the Virgin's shrine, let soft tears roll down her cheeks, tears that proceeded from no pain, for which she could have given no reason. There were other days when she sprang up with a sensation of intense joy in the mere fact of life; when the flight of a butterfly had a secret for her alone, and the fragrance of the mignonette beneath her window stole up to her with a message for her, and her only.

She was afraid to answer Grafton's words; she dared not speak, for there were many things of which she had always been so sure that were slipping from her. She was relieved when her father rejoined them; even glad when Grafton, having finished his afternoon's work, put up his box and brushes and said good-by.

He was wondering a little to himself at the im-

pulse that had prompted him to open his heart to her, as he shut the gate behind him, and stepped into the lane. A sound of wheels made him look up, and down the hill came Diane, sitting high in her cart, driving two glossy bay horses tandem.

Before he had time to do more than raise his hat, she said, —

"I see now why your *work* is so engrossing."

Then she lightly laid the lash of her whip on the leader's flank, and the horses started suddenly, to the discomfiture of a sulky looking groom behind.

Her voice had been so harsh, and her manner so expressive of disdain, that Grafton felt a sting of anger.

"Why does she think that I must account to her for my goings and comings?" he asked himself; in spite of which, beneath the feeling of displeasure was a subtle sense of being flattered.

CHAPTER X

One afternoon in mid-October Grafton summoned Madame Richer to his room on his return from a walk, which had led him strangely enough in the direction of the Vernon house, and demanded her advice on a subject of deep importance.

"Next Tuesday a stag-hunt will take place in the forest of Amboise, and I want a good carriage and pair of horses to follow, for I 've asked some friends to go with me; and you must put me up the best luncheon you can manage. Now where can I find the horses?"

"Is it the château people who are to be monsieur's guests?" she asked, glancing sideways at him.

As she did so something in her face struck her lodger, and, instead of replying, he said kindly: —

"Are you quite well? You 're not looking up to the mark. Why don't you take a rest and get some one to help with the work? I 'd make the money part all right."

The color rushed into her face, and her voice sounded almost sullen as she replied: —

"We all have trials in our lives. Monsieur is very good, but neither he nor any one else can help me. If he will kindly give his orders?"

"Well, then, if you won't take my help, you must give me yours. I have invited Monsieur Vernon and his family to go with me on Tuesday, and I want to show them that we savages can do things well when we choose."

The winning sunniness of Grafton's smile but added to the sting of remorse in Madame Richer's breast. For six months she had played the part of a spy for the curé, and it had begun to work on her nerves. She trembled to discover anything against Grafton, for she had grown to like him, but she sometimes wished that she could give the priest all the information he wanted, and free herself from his continual supervision. To silence this sting she threw herself into the proposed arrangements with simulated interest. She announced that only Tours could prove equal to providing horses for such an occasion. Accordingly the next morning Grafton set out on his quest by train, and returned seated superbly in a large open landau. Madame Richer rushed out to meet him, calling the servant for the packages with which the carriage was laden.

"Take them all into the kitchen; they are some little additions for our luncheon," ordered Grafton, following after he had told the smart town coachman where his horses were to be lodged. In the kitchen Madame Richer was carefully untying the strings about the various parcels.

"Two large pâté-de-foie-gras; six bottles of champagne, but real champagne, Denis; see, then,

the labels. And the bonbonnières! Oh the loves, the dear little boxes! And hothouse grapes, and plum-cakes! But pardon, monsieur, how many guests are you going to have?"

"Monsieur and Mademoiselle Vernon," replied Grafton, somewhat feebly; his purchases looked rather ample now that he saw them spread out on the table.

Madame Richer lifted her hands and eyes to heaven.

"All that for three! Merciful saints!"

"The coachman must be fed, too, you know."

"Oh, the coachman, the coachman! Perhaps monsieur was thinking that the horses in France have to have pâtés and all these good things."

"If they do they shall eat them to-morrow. I am giving my first invitation, and I don't intend my guests to be hungry."

"Monsieur need not be alarmed. And that reminds me; there is a note for monsieur in his room; shall Denis fetch it?"

"No, thanks; I 'm going up to dress for dinner; I 'll find it."

There on his table lay an envelope addressed in Diane's hand, that had become familiar to Grafton. Half a dozen times a week a servant from the château would appear with a line saying that he was wanted for this or that. To-day's message was an invitation to use one of the baron's horses the next day, and join the château party for the hunt. Grafton wrote a word before he dined,

explaining why he could not accept, and took it down to find Denis.

The landlady nodded at him: "Put it down, monsieur, if you please; I 'll run up with it myself; I 've business with the cook."

"She overworks herself for the sake of the rest," thought Grafton, little thinking that his innocent note was closely inspected at the presbytery, if nothing more, before it found its way into Diane's hands.

The Tuesday morning dawned clear and bright. A crispness in the air was evidence that summer had gone, but the emerald of the meadows and the tenderness of the sky tempted one to forget the sad fact.

Grafton, seated opposite Monsieur Vernon and Suzette in his ample carriage, was in boyish spirits. The poet was twinkling with anticipated pleasure, and Suzette's face was beaming and glowing with the mere fact that life was so full of joy and beauty. Madame Vernon had thought that the excursion would prove too tiresome for her, and had decided to use her rare day of leisure in shopping at Tours.

"You know that papa would think that the world was coming to an end if he should not find mamma always waiting for him; I 'm of no use whatever in her absence. So it 's a great thing for her to have a whole day all to herself. She is happy, we are happy, and poor Paddy's being left is the only blot."

"It would be a much bigger blot if he were here," returned Grafton.

He had never seen Suzette so charming. Her presence was always a source of deep satisfaction to him, and he never came into it without a vague memory of far-off Sundays when he used to dine with his dear grandmother, a sensation of being at home, of being understood; also the elevating influence of being able to appreciate the character, clear as crystal in its sincerity, that shone through the young girl's truthful eyes. He had begun once to tell her of the curious association in his mind, but it occurred to him that even so reasonable a person as Suzette might resent being told by a young man that she reminded him of his grandmother, and the train of thought being too subtle to bear a full explanation, he kept a discreet silence.

"Do you observe how correct papa is this morning?" asked Suzette as they drove over the Amboise bridge, the château towering above them, its carved pinnacles showing in a lacework of white tracery against the dazzling blue of the sky. "He wanted to wear some of his most marvelous garments, but we persuaded him to dress like an ordinary mortal on your account."

"I think it 's rather hard to make a bugbear out of me, when I like all his clothes, and am always telling him so."

"That 's because you 're an artist, and don't know any better."

"When you are as old as I am," observed Monsieur Vernon, "you will know that women are unable to appreciate anything out of the ordinary in their own family. But if a stranger happens to do the most extravagant things, then it 's all right, and shows his wit and invention."

Through the quaint little town they dashed in fine style, under the old clock-tower arch, along streets lined with timbered houses leaning forward towards each other as if telling delightful scandals, out again into the open country. Then came a long winding hill that checked the speed even of the fiery steeds from Tours. As they slowly mounted, the view beneath spread wider and wider, showing a rich rolling country; the red leaves on the vines, denuded of their fruit, gleamed in the sunlight like stained glass; here and there a square of winter wheat, just beginning to push through the brown earth, gave a delusive touch of spring; in the dimpled valleys of smaller streams than the wide Loire, a château would appear for a moment, through the violet mist, looking like some airy habitation carved from ivory for fairies. Opposite, on the hill, the great château of Amboise dominated the whole landscape, proudly defending the uplands that project like a promontory into the plains below. Over beyond the forest began.

A *carrefour* known to the coachman had been appointed for the meet, and as Grafton's party drove up they found a many-colored group already assembled about the base of a huge cross, standing

where four alleys meet. It is beautifully proportioned, and is made from the massive trunks of trees that must have spent their whole lives near the place now consecrated by them with the holy emblem. Suzette crossed herself as they drew near.

"How beautiful it is, and how lonely! I shall think of this cross on winter nights when the wind howls and makes all the other trees complain; these will not bend or move, but stay quite still and patient."

But the changing groups, the gayly dressed riders, the leashed hounds made a picture that soon drew thoughts and eyes earthward. Monsieur Vernon told Grafton the names of the master of the equipage, and the other members of the hunt, who were easily distinguished by their dark blue coats faced with claret velvet. Coming and going among them were officers from Tours, gentlemen in the regulation pink coat, hussars in clear blue, all adding to the brilliancy of the scene. A few minutes after Grafton's arrival a drag came bowling along the wide road, driven by Diane. Temple sat by her side, and her father and the baron were behind. The saddle-horses from the château stables were led forward from a little distance where they had been in waiting, and the baronne, followed by her cavaliers, mounted. She wore a close-fitting pink coat, which showed every curve of her supple, rounded figure; her blond hair was braided in a queue, and tied with a black ribbon,

according well with the fashion of her three-cornered hat. Temple was her shadow. He it was who tossed her lightly as a feather into her saddle; he it was who seemed to keep a jealous watch over her when she returned the greetings of the other riders. He had changed much during the last month, and the fresh, boyish expression had disappeared. Something hard and rigid showed in the lines about his close-shaven mouth, and his eyes were restless. Latterly a hint of brutality had crept into his tone when speaking of women, and he had made some remarks to the baronne before Grafton, that made the artist glad that Suzette had never attracted him. Diane could bear such speeches without wincing, for she had been formed in a plain-spoken school. Grafton hoped that it was but a phase through which the budding diplomatist was passing, but he could not help seeing the change, and attributing it to Diane's influence. As he watched the two this morning he was struck by the dogged manner in which Temple kept by her side, usurping her society, and even showing some rudeness to the other hunters when they came up to pay their respects.

"I must say good-morning to Madame Ernst," said Grafton, and suiting the action to the word he left his carriage, and found his way among the crowd of carts, wagonettes, and riders, to her side.

At first she seemed not to see him, being busied with the strap of her saddle. When at last he spoke loudly enough to gain her attention, her

manner was so cold and haughty as to surprise him. She either did not, or chose not to see his offered hand, and having answered as briefly as possible she deliberately turned her horse, and moved away. Grafton was puzzled and nettled. He could not understand her manner, for it did not occur to him that she could be so childish as to resent his refusal to accompany her that day. She had plenty of people to be with her; that she had particularly wanted him, and no one else, never entered his mind.

The baron, who had noted the little incident, seemed inclined to make up for his wife's coldness by extra cordiality. He rode close to the landau, greeted Monsieur Vernon as an old acquaintance, bowed respectfully to Suzette, and entered into a long account of the science of the hunt, really making some of its mysteries clearer to the brains of his listeners than if they had been familiar to him from his childhood. He made them observe how the forest was laid out like a giant spider's web, the alleys that run from common centres, like the spokes of a wheel, being joined by transverse cuts through the trees, so that with the knowledge of venery possessed by the head *piqueur*, it is not as magical as it seems to keep up with the stag and dogs. He told them how this same notable member of society had sent out an underling in the dim dawn, with an experienced old hound, to find the scent, and how he was now able to make his report as to the age and condition of the game, as well as where he was at that very moment.

"There they are now, consulting with the master," he said, pointing out the little group, talking earnestly together. "They will first consult my father-in-law, however, as they all have a great regard for him as an old and famous master."

Even as he spoke, they advanced to the marquis, who listened with his usually distant manner a little modified by the excitement of the moment. A few quick words were spoken, a command apparently given, and then a general movement was made among the assembled pleasure-seekers.

The hounds were led forward, one pair after another was slipped, the riders got their horses well in hand, those who followed on wheels manœuvred to obtain the best places, and after a short period of suspense a cry burst forth, the horn gave the signal to tell that the stag was away, and the cavalcade swept on.

It is no simple thing to follow successfully. One must have a knowledge of the science of the affair, and not merely a theoretic knowledge. It was well for Grafton that his coachman was an old hand, and knew from the first what rider it was best to take as a guide. Thanks to this they had more than one glimpse of the stag as he crossed the alleys. He never gave the impression that he was going very fast, or that he was hard pressed; there seemed to be no panic in his graceful bounds.

But they did not as a rule keep with the main body of riders. In fact the entire company seemed to be broken up, each going his own way, to the

best of his knowledge. Thus the old forest became the scene of a succession of moving pictures. Now down the blue vista of an alley would come the vivid scarlet of a hunter's coat; the trees, especially the oaks still retaining their leaves, made a network of shadow and light on the rider and the shining flank of his horse. Then some hound, strayed from the pack, would run hastily through the brakes and ferns among the thin underbrush, his nose to the ground, his ears dejected. Again when they seemed to have lost the stag, the dogs, and all the hunt, a faint sound would come through the far-stretching alleys, the coachman would lift his hand in respectful warning, and now louder, now lower, would float the notes of the horn. Once more the horses would lift their heads, the carriage would take a sharp turn, and there they would be in the midst of the chase again. They were standing in a side alley, watching the hounds sweep by, when Suzette looked into Grafton's face.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked.

"At an absurd idea I had. The way the hounds hold their tails makes me think of one of Velasquez's most famous pictures at Madrid. It is called the Treaty of Breda, and the masterly way he has managed a lot of spears is brought up to me by the way they mass their sterns."

At noon the famous banquet was prepared in the carriage, and eaten with much mirth. It was a day of golden moments, and while the merriment, and pleasure, and excitement made the hours glide by, a noble animal was fighting time for his life.

"Have you any idea where Amboise is, papa?" inquired Suzette, towards four o'clock in the afternoon. "We have turned and twisted so that I am quite lost."

Monsieur Vernon looked at the level rays of the sun, gilding the trunks of the trees, and pointed in an opposite direction.

"It should be over there; am I right, coachman?"

"Yes, monsieur; and we are not so very far away either," was the reply.

They had heard nothing for some little time, when suddenly a new note from the horn burst out, not at any great distance.

"He 's taking to the water," exclaimed the coachman, gathering up his reins and whipping his horses. They rolled quickly forward, and in another moment across their very path ran the pursued deer dripping wet. He stumbled once, and so near was he that they could see the wide spread of his nostrils, "like pits, full of blood to the brim;" the eyes starting from their sockets; the fall of the flank as exhaustion overcame him. Another second, and he had turned to circle back to his death. Close on his heels came the pack, followed in their turn by those huntsmen lucky enough to be near at hand. Diane was among the foremost, her eyes and cheeks glowing with the excitement, sitting lightly and easily, managing her horse with such skill that he seemed to be as fresh after his long day as his mistress. The

baronne had retained much of the spirit of childhood, and she looked like a little *gamine* in the dash and rush of the moment. On swept the cavalcade, down a gentle slope leading to the borders of a small pond.

"He 's gone round!" shouted a voice, and those who were mounted turned their horses sharply. But the pond's margin proved too soft for them. The master, with one faithful follower, took the road by which they had just arrived, retracing his steps; two *piqueurs* leaped to the ground, and called to a man who was sitting idly in a flatboat; the rest looked on, their cries and exclamations filling the air.

"There go the hounds, splashing in the water. He must show soon, for they will have him out. There 's the master. Ah!"

The sun was setting now in a clear sky, shaded from a rich orange up to pale primrose; the small lake reflected the brilliant tones, and the last shout had been called forth by the sight of the stag in plain view. He was making for the deeper water, and his noble head showed dark against the golden background as he advanced fighting the foremost dogs, who were leaping about him. He seemed to defend himself with his feet more than with his horns. Farther and farther he pushed into the water, his branching tynes lifted high, his attitude one of agonized defiance. Then he began to swim; the rippled water was shaded with tones of umber, and the heads of the dogs were hardly

visible in the commotion; but they were there, on his haunches, trying to drag him down.

"If monsieur will dismount, he will see all," suggested the coachman, and Grafton, fully excited, jumped to the ground, holding out his hand to Suzette. Her father had leaped out with the alacrity of sixteen, but she shook her head.

"You go; I 'd rather stay here," she said; there was a little tremble in her voice, but it was lost in the confused sounds about them.

"Come, my friend, come!" shouted her father, plunging down to the water's edge. Grafton gave one look to see if the rugs were well arranged for Suzette, and then he too was gone.

The girl sat alone, her head turned away. She could not bear to see the death of the gallant animal who had fought bravely for his life all the long day. She had not realized that the end for him would be death. She had been carried along with the others by the excitement of the motion, the novelty of the sights and sounds, and — perhaps — the joy of being near Grafton, of talking with him, of watching him. Now it was all over, and the end was a butchery. Oh, the cruelty of it all! the cruelty!

Grafton was troubled by no such thoughts. His artistic nature had for the moment the upper hand, and he was drunk with delight; the movement, the grouping, the cries of the dogs in the water, the savage dignity of the stag in his last attempts to save himself, the black silhouettes of the men in

the boat putting off from shore, all brought a keen sense of joy.

"Are they going to spare him?" he thought, as he saw the dogs sullenly leave him at the cries of the huntsmen. "By Jove, he deserves it; how splendidly he stands there!"

Then came a sharp report; the branched head tottered; a stain of crimson gushed into the gold of the lake, and it was over. A few minutes more and the lifeless body of the valiant beast which had made sport for his masters was towed to the shore.

"I will bring my daughter for the curée; you go on, and begin your sketch," said Monsieur Vernon.

To see this finishing episode, to make notes, and compare it with Courbet's famous picture, La Curée, owned in Boston by a friend of his mother's, had been the nominal object of Grafton's day. He placed himself near the head *piqueur* who was busy with the body. In a short time his skillful knife had separated the good parts from those left for the dogs, and they were hung on the branch of a tree; the carcass was covered with the skin; and the huntsmen drew up, their horns at their lips. Then began the music of the "curée chaude," a wild sound, echoing through the darkening woods, repeating itself in fainter sounds from across the glimmering water, — a note of triumph for the successful finish, a strain of respect for the memory of the brave stag.

The musical part ended, the skin was withdrawn, and the hounds who until now had been

restrained, rushed snarling, growling, tearing, fighting, to the scene of carnage. Blood everywhere, smeared over their sides, dripping from the green brakes, — a sight of horror, yet with a barbarous fascination all its own.

Suddenly Grafton felt a touch on his shoulder. "My daughter is faint; she ought to be taken home, but she refuses to have your work interrupted," said a worried voice in his ear.

In a second Grafton had turned.

"Faint! Oh, how thoughtless to bring her here! I don't care to stay another moment, I assure you."

He told the truth for the time, but when he found that Suzette was in earnest, and really was made unhappy by the idea of interfering with him, he agreed on a compromise. The fortunes of the day had brought them to within three miles of home, and Grafton was glad of a chance to stretch his legs and warm himself by a walk. He took off his overcoat, and, wrapping it round Suzette, said good-night, promising himself to find out how she was the moment he returned to Beaulieu.

He recommenced his rapid sketching, and was so absorbed in it that it was nothing but habit which made him lift his hat when Diane strolled up to him a minute or two later.

"Well, have you enjoyed your day, driving about like a good father of a family?" she asked in her mocking tones.

"Thanks, yes. Will you please stand a little more to the right?" he answered in an absent-

minded way. He had quite forgotten her coldness of the morning, his work claiming all his attention. But Diane misunderstood the curtness of his reply. She smiled, and her eyes glowed as she thought, "I have hurt him! So much the better."

Then she continued: "How are you going to get home, now that you have sent away your caravan, your flocks and your herds?"

"Walk."

"He feels it more than I thought," was her reflection, as she moved off so quietly that none of her party, not even Temple, saw her mount, and direct her horse to an alley leading towards Amboise.

Gradually the light faded, the *piqueurs* began to make ready for departure, and Grafton, putting up his book with the feeling that he had something worth carrying away with him, lent an ear to the talk going on among the riders as they prepared to mount.

"Yes," rang out the baron's voice, "I have bought all the land on that side of the alley, and have put five hundred rabbits in it. Next year I hope I shall have something worth asking you gentlemen to shoot."

"Is this the limit of the forest?" asked Grafton.

"Yes, monsieur, and if you are going to walk home, let me advise you to take the first turn to your right; it leads through my property, and saves at least half a mile. I must take the main road, as I have an errand by the way, but

Monsieur de Beaulieu may be going by that path, and he will direct you," said Félix, ever eager to show others his possessions.

"I am sorry that I must keep to the main road," said the marquis, with his air of old-time courtesy. "My daughter has already started, and should not be alone so late. I will put you on your path, however, and once found it is hard to miss."

Ten minutes later Grafton was swinging along rather a narrow path, which he was told would bring him out close to the town of Amboise. The evening air was eager, and made him glad to walk fast, sending the blood racing through his veins. Already the dusk of twilight was on the treetops, between whose branches the earliest stars twinkled with a frosty light. The rapid motion and the cold atmosphere were exhilarating; he began to whistle as he strode along. Suddenly something dark seemed to block the path ahead of him. He paused, silent for a moment, to discover what it was, and as he stood still a woman's voice rang through the dusk, a voice that he knew, although now it was sharp with anger.

"You brute! How dare you! Let go! Let go!"

Grafton sprang forward, and in another second was beside the struggling mass. A bold-looking, strong-built fellow had seized the bridle of Diane's horse with one hand, while with the other he firmly held her whip arm, which she was fruitlessly trying to free, at the same time spurring her hunter,

who plunged and kicked, but could do little more in that firm grasp. The fellow was simply attempting to restrain her, and a smile upon his hard mouth indicated a positive enjoyment in his mastery.

"Hold there, you scoundrel!" shouted Grafton, as he leaped to one side to be free of the horse's heels.

At the words the man let go his hold with an oath, and rushed upon his new adversary, while the horse bolted away with his rider.

There was a short struggle; the best heavyweight boxer of his college days was too much for the unskilled Frenchman. Diane, having quieted and gained control of her horse, rode back to hear a dull thud, and the crackle of dry twigs, as the man rolled over, his face to the ground, and remained motionless.

Grafton, breathing heavily, turned to Diane, and all the schoolmaster, that Stevenson says is in every man, rang in his voice as he said, —

"Ride on, please ; this is no sight for you."

But Diane was too excited to obey, or even to listen to him. She was trembling, not with fear, but a savage fury that a low creature, a peasant, a poacher, had dared to touch her. She was filled with disgust that his hands had been on her arm, that she had been even for a minute in his power, and her fierce joy at seeing him felled like an ox to the ground caused her voice to ring with exultation as she asked : —

"Is he dead? Did you kill him? Oh, I hope so, I hope so! He is a poacher, and on our land too."

"Do as I bid you; ride on," said Grafton sternly, shocked by her callousness to human life. She was about to answer when she caught a look in his eye that made her hand release her horse's head. She had encountered a will stronger than her own; and, strange to say, she liked the instinctive yielding to it.

Her suggestion that the man might be dead had alarmed Grafton. He knelt by his late foe, and put his hand inside his blouse; there was no doubt that the heart was beating, and beating fast, too.

"Are you much hurt?" he asked, supporting him.

"I don't know," was the reply. "What are you going to do with me?"

"How did you happen to attack the lady?" counter-questioned the victor.

"I did n't attack her. She came on me with a rabbit in my hand, and she struck me with her stick across the face. There 's something in me can't stand that. I was n't going to hurt her."

The young fellow was sitting up now, and Grafton saw his dark eyes and glistening white teeth.

"But you were poaching, you know," he said, not feeling the enormity of the crime as a European would, but thinking it necessary to enlarge on it.

"I know it," burst out the offender recklessly. "I can't help it; it 's stronger than I. My father was a gentleman, though I don't look it, and he

was never without a gun in his hand. All the world praised him for being a fine shot; his pride 's my curse. I suppose it 's in my blood; any way I 've tried and tried, but it 's stronger than I," he reiterated.

"Can't you get some work that will interest you, and keep you out of mischief?"

"I 've tried. I 'm a splendid gardener. I had a fine situation, but one day the madness caught me; I was found with a pheasant; the gamekeeper shot at me; I fired back, and then I ran. I 'm in hiding now."

"Well, get up, and walk along with me; we 'll talk as we go," said Grafton.

The fellow made a movement, and then gave a suppressed groan.

"You 're hurt?"

"It 's my shoulder, I think."

Grafton felt of it, and found that it was dislocated; his football days came back to him as he gave a skillful pull and a turn; the man bore it patiently, and pleased his conqueror by his endurance. They started slowly along, side by side.

Suddenly Grafton asked: —

"What makes you follow me, and why do you give up to me?"

"Because, monsieur, I felt you hit me as if I was a man, not a dog. Besides, I know you; I 'm sure you 'll play fair."

"How do you know me? Where have you ever seen me?"

The answer was an inarticulate murmur, and, after waiting for a moment, Grafton continued: —

"Have you any family?"

"My mother; and it would be a good day for her if you had killed me, as madame la baronne hoped you had."

"Did you know her, too?" asked Grafton, a little startled. But again his companion gave no answer.

They walked on in silence until the thinning trees showed that they were nearly at the open road. Here Grafton stopped short, and said: —

"I don't want you to come with me any further. I 'm not going to arrest you. Now what are you going to do with yourself?"

"I don't know, monsieur. I 'd like to go back and get the rabbit I trapped. I dropped it as she came up."

"Are you mad to go on in the same way after such a lesson as you 've just had?"

"Yes, monsieur, I believe I am mad. I sometimes think that if I could get somewhere, where shooting 's no crime, I could make a good life for myself. I 've tried so hard to be steady, for — my — mother; but it 's no use."

All his pluck and bravado melted away, and he leaned against a tree, and sobbed, not violently, but hopelessly.

"Have you ever thought of going to a new country?" inquired Grafton.

"Yes, many a time. If I only had money enough to go to monsieur's country."

"How the devil do you know what my country is?" interrupted Grafton, in surprise.

"I know monsieur. This is not the first time I 've seen him."

"Now, my boy, I 'll tell you what I 'll do. I 've seen more than one of you Frenchmen, who have no chance here, but who would be useful and steady in another place. I 'll give you enough to take you out to Australia, where you 'll find plenty of rabbits to shoot, and will be thanked, not kicked, for your pains."

"Monsieur is very, very good," said the man humbly. "But if it 's the same to him I 'd rather go to his country."

"Well, it 's not the same to me." Grafton smiled in the darkness as he spoke. "I 'm very patriotic, and as you 're somewhat of an experiment, I prefer it to be tried in some other fellow's country. We have plenty of experiments of our own, you see."

"Yes, monsieur," said the man submissively. He did n't see, but he thought it his duty to pretend to.

"Now, how will you get your money?" asked Grafton. "I have nothing with me. Could you manage to come to the Silver Crescent in the village of Beaulieu some evening?"

"Oh yes, monsieur."

"You can find it?"

"Oh, but certainly, monsieur." There was a tone almost of amusement in his voice.

"Well, good-night then, and keep out of mischief for a time, any way."

"I thank monsieur with all my heart," came the answer from the gloom, as Grafton once more started on his walk.

As he reviewed the events of the last half hour, it occurred to him that he had perhaps been a trifle rash in promising to help an outlaw. "But, by Jove," he said to himself, "I 'd rather help ten rascals, with the chance that one was a worthy sort of fellow, than refuse them, and run the risk of losing the one good man. Besides, I did hit him hard." The ready wish to aid, the sense of brotherhood with all men, is a strong characteristic of Grafton's race, and was well developed in him.

Then came the memory of Diane's exultation at the poacher's overthrow, and her wish for his death. It stood out in bold relief against Suzette's tender pity for the hunted stag. How different the two women were ! He wondered if Diane's attitude of insolent superiority towards the man, as if she were of a different order of beings, came from her long line of ancestry, and was an inheritance from those feudal lords, who had held their stronghold in the teeth of the foe, and had ruled over the peasants clustered at their gates as if they had been beasts of the field. It was a quality new to him in a woman; he had seen men who were brutal, but a woman, never.

He had crossed the bridge, and was on his way by the château grounds, just where the first houses

of the villagers begin to edge the road. The light of crackling wood fires shone out from the open upper parts of the half doors, so common in Touraine, and the comfortable smell of cooking, mixed with the aromatic scent of pine-cone kindlings, filled the air from time to time. Suddenly a horse passed slowly through one of the shafts of firelight shining across the road, and Grafton saw that its rider was Diane. At the same moment she heard his footsteps, ringing on the hard ground, and stopped, looking eagerly round.

"I was beginning to be worried about you," she began. "You were very long, but it is useless to be frightened about a man who hits as hard as you do."

He was close by her side now, and she put out her hand. He took it, and she let it rest in his; the wayward light shone on her gay coat, and glinted in the green depths of her eyes. She was calm and unshaken by the experience, which had been at least startling, and Grafton's own courage leaped up in an admiring recognition of hers.

"You are very brave," he said simply.

"So are you."

As she spoke, the little hand closed softly about his. Then she turned in her saddle, touched her horse, and as he resumed his slow walk, Grafton keeping by her side, she asked: —

"And the poacher, was he dead?"

"It 's a pity you are not as kind as you are brave; you 'd be almost perfect," said Grafton, chilled from his momentary glow of admiration.

"I *can* be very kind, sometimes," she answered in a low voice. Then recurring to her question, "But what became of that wretch?"

"He 's all right; he won't trouble you again."

"He 's in jail?"

"No."

"Tell me, tell me! I want to know where he is."

"I don't know at this moment where he is; but you need n't be afraid of him; I 've arranged all that."

"Afraid!" she echoed scornfully. "It 's not that; I want him punished."

"What 's the use of punishing a poor fellow like him?"

"Use? Use? You 're crazy! Why, he was poaching! He caught hold of me! He touched me! He should lose his head for it."

"He 's not going to lose his head, and he 's going to have a chance to make something of himself."

"How?"

"That 's my affair."

"Then you tell me seriously that you are not going to have him arrested?"

"Certainly not."

"In that case I shall do it myself. I don't understand you."

"Can't you understand being sorry for a poor devil who 's got into a scrape, and has already been well punished?"

"No, I can't. He caught hold of me."

"After you 'd struck him; he got it from each of us."

"He 'll get more; I 'll have him transported for life," she answered sharply, stung by his quiet humor.

"And make a brute of him forever," he replied. "No, you 'll do no such thing."

"Who 'll stop me?"

"I will."

"*You!*" She brought her horse to a standstill, and looked down at him.

"I 'm interested in him, and mean to make a man of him if I can; at least give him the chance."

"I shall make a complaint in half an hour," she said imperiously, after a moment's pause, starting her horse as she spoke.

"Then I shall do my best to thwart you."

"How dare you speak so to me? What right have you to dictate to me?" There was a ring of supreme haughtiness in her voice.

"The right given by common humanity; the right imposed on every man who believes that he should love his neighbor as himself."

There was a silence; Diane was thinking. Admiration for Grafton's brute force; an indulgent surprise at what she called his "softness," indignation at his obstinacy; a helpless battling against his tone of authority, mingled with hurt pride that he did not consider the insult she had suffered worthy of redress, — all these feelings had possessed her in turn, and now they were all thrown

into the background by the strange new light his last words had flashed into her mind. To love one's neighbor as one's self, to call a low poacher one's neighbor, — these were lessons taught to children, but did any one really believe them? — more, practice them? — above all, a man, who was young, and strong, and handsome? Even if it had been light Grafton would have seen no sign of the thoughts that were shaking her, in Diane's cold, impassive face. A last flame of rebellion shot up in her heart; she would *not* be dictated to by him! Then a quiet sense of his power, not without its fascination, — the reluctant fascination always felt by a woman of strong will when she recognizes that she has met her master, — took her in its hold.

The cottages became more frequent. A few rods beyond the light from the Silver Crescent shone through the cheerful red curtains.

"Any way, I shall have this coat burned," said Diane suddenly, in the manner of a child who is conquered but not subdued.

Grafton laughed. He had been troubled by her persistence, fearing that it would involve him in many difficulties. He would have contended to the end, for firmness (or obstinacy, was it?) formed one of his chief attributes, but now he felt with relief that the day was his.

"There is your landlady looking out for you; good-night," she added.

"Oh, I 'm going to walk up to the château with you, to keep you out of harm."

"Nonsense, I 'm at home now," and tapping her horse on the shoulder she started him into a smart trot, and disappeared in the gloom.

"I was beginning to be afraid that some harm had come to monsieur, but as he was with madame la baronne it seems that he was all right," said Madame Richer, watching him intently.

"Oh yes, I 'm all right. May Denis go at once to Monsieur Vernon's, and inquire how mademoiselle is?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

And as she served his dinner half an hour later, and saw his smile when he read the line brought back by Denis, she said in her heart: —

"He 's a clever fox; he thinks to throw dust in my eyes, but he can't."

CHAPTER XI

The day after the hunt was almost hot; one of those tantalizing glimpses that summer sometimes gives us, when she steps for a moment before the curtain, already lowered, and tastes for the last time the applause she loves so well, before laying down her rose-garlanded head for her long rest. Suzette was kneeling at the low window of her room, leaning her arms on the ledge, and letting the sun sift his beams down on to her hair, bringing out gleams of bronze and gold with the magic of his touch. Below on the terrace the bees were busy among the ivy blossoms that filled the air with their pungent odors; the faint, rank smell of the flowers, over-blown, mingled with them; now and then a belated horse-chestnut would fall with a thud to the ground, or a yellow leaf from the poplars would sink gently through the tender blue atmosphere.

Suzette's room was like herself; her sincere, earnest, joyous nature seemed symbolized by the objects with which she had surrounded herself. The gay bouquets of cornflowers and wheat scattered over the wall-paper and chintz; the dainty, white-draped table, where her mirror and toilet articles were laid with care; the ample, well-pro-

vided work-table, standing near the chimney-corner, covered with rolls of coarse garments for the poor, or more artistic work wrapped in silk handkerchiefs; the little shelf of her favorite books; the shrine above her *prie-dieu*, where before the image of the Virgin always bloomed a bunch of flowers, fresh each morning, — all told of her full, sweet life, unchanged till now.

Until the last month every day had been fraught with the interest she took in her occupations; the hours were never long enough for all that she wished to do; there was always before her a lengthening vista of duties, kind acts to others, self-improvement, the part she bore in the household to save her mother from over-exertion. The duties had brought their own reward until recently, but now all seemed changed. She was restless, unable to stay long in any one place, impatient of restraint. She found it more than ever difficult to keep her quick tongue under control, and little traits in her father, that had formerly brought a gleam of indulgent amusement, now irritated her. She liked to be alone, and would spend hours looking off towards the horizon, sometimes with a smile on her lips, sometimes with a quiet tear in her eye. She was filled now with a soft melancholy, not unpleasing, and then would turn with an almost painful burst of affection to her parents. And the change had been caused by a good-looking stranger. For eighteen years the love of father and mother had been all in all to

her. Now the thrill of a firm voice, the quick light in a pair of gray eyes that seemed cold and reserved until they met hers fully, together with a strong personality, had in six months come to seem the most important things in her world.

As she leaned there in the autumn sun, a sound came to her ear making her heart leap within her; a clear whistle, louder and louder, of that most bewildering of love songs, "C'est le Rossignol." Then a quick, impatient ring at the garden gate, and a murmur of voices. Would he be sent away, because her mother was out, and her father busy in his study? A rush, a little white figure bounding through the centre of the court, *his* voice saying, "Paddy, you 're a nuisance at times," then a step on the gravel, and the gray eyes are gazing up into the brown ones.

However fast Suzette's heart may be beating, it is a gallant, brave little heart, and her voice is clear and unembarrassed as she says, "Good-morning."

"Must I go away, as the maid seems to imply?" asked Grafton, entreaty in his voice and face.

"Papa is very busy over his wine accounts," she answered, "and mamma is with mademoiselle, who has a horrid cold, all because monsieur le curé won't let her light a fire before November. Ah, it makes me so angry!"

"But you are at home?"

"As you see."

"But I can't see when you are so far off, and

you would be very kind to come down, because you know I must be going back to my work in Paris before long."

A hard hand seemed to press the valiant heart with a cruel touch as he said that, but her lips still smiled.

"We 'll ask papa to open his window, and play propriety, shall we?"

"Please."

The charming head was withdrawn, and Grafton stood gazing at the place where it had been. All his easy self-possession seemed to vanish when he was with Suzette; the homelike sensation that she gave him was mingled with a boyish desire to do what she would wish. He had known women of many types, good, bad, and indifferent, but he had never been impressed before by the wonderful charm and dignity of a pure, good soul. Suzette, with her sunny eyes, her tender heart, her quick temper, had enthroned herself in his life, and her sway was gracious, but positive.

During the last years when he had lived face to face with nature, Grafton's character had been quietly forming itself, unconsciously absorbing the wide lessons in the book that God has spread out, so that he who will may read. Naturally serious and reserved, he had battled in silence with the doubts that had at times assailed him. He had never ignored any difficulty to himself, but had thought it out gravely. In the old days these doubts and difficulties had brought their sharp

pangs of melancholy despondency, but from the moment when he had found his life's work, he had gone on his path, ever stepping more surely and more lightly. There had been dark hours, when the "divine despair" of his incomplete powers had possessed him, but those hours ennoble the strong spirit, and Grafton had come to welcome them as a sign that his present discontent meant the spur towards better results. His mind was set on high things; he never thought of his soul as something to be saved for his own good, but regarded himself as a part of God's whole. If he failed, not he alone would suffer, but the entire scheme would be kept back by so much as he had retarded it.

He seldom spoke of his views, but now and then he had said a word or two to Suzette on serious subjects, and she had seemed to meet him half-way; he believed that if each unveiled his and her secret thoughts, they would be the same. He had a perfect trust in her goodness and her judgment; he felt that his future was in her hands, but he dreaded to trouble the calm of the present. Besides, he wanted her to love him for himself. He had a horror of the system of French marriages, and until he could read in her truthful eyes that she held him dearer than all the world he would say no word. Oh, Master Grafton, do you think that a young girl can be read like an open book? Do you believe that you are equal to the simplest, the most transparent of them all? Are you going on looking for stars in the skies until you fall into the

well? I believe you are, for it has been my experience that the finer the man the more incapable he is of understanding the tremulous shades of a woman's nature. Grafton, however, thought that it would be the simplest thing in the world to know the very moment when Suzette began to care for him, if she ever did. She would blush, and look away from him when he spoke to her, and at him when she thought he could not see her; her hand would tremble when it rested in his; oh yes, he was extremely wise about it all, and he felt injured for a moment when she came on to the terrace, and gave him her hand frankly, her clear eyes meeting his.

"Papa says that if we do not talk too loud, you may stay to tea," she said, putting her work-basket on the table, and seating herself in the chair Grafton placed for her.

"You are really quite well to-day? Your father's note last evening took away my anxiety, but it was thoughtless of me to let you see such a brutal sight."

"I was silly, I know; but I 'm not very strong-minded, and the poor stag, — oh, don't talk of it, please."

She bent her head over her basket, pretending to look for something, and the little curls at the roots of her hair on her rounded neck were all that he could see.

"Are you really going to Paris soon?"

Her manner was very indifferent, perhaps a

little too much so to be misguiding to any one else; but Grafton jabbed the gravel viciously with his stick, as he thought, "She doesn't care a sixpence." Then the silence reminded him that there was a question to be answered, and he, not to be outdone in indifference, said lightly, "Yes, I have finished my work here; now I must apply all that my summer has taught me."

She made no reply, and her needle went back and forth with a jerky motion. She looked so pretty, so womanly with her bent head, that Grafton could not help saying, —

"Shan't you miss me, a little?"

"Of course I shall." Her voice was very low; then she added, "And Paddy too! dear little Paddy."

She put more enthusiasm into her regret for Paddy, which Grafton did not fail to notice. Still she had said that she would miss him; that was enough for that day; he would feast on the crumb of comfort, and not demand a larger feast. So he began to tell her about his work, what he hoped, and how he saw his own limitations; and she listened with the feeling that he was very, very good to talk to her of the things he cared most for, while the sun fell slowly through the radiant blue, and the bees made the best of their brief working hour. Suddenly Suzette looked up. "The weather is going to change."

"How can you tell?"

"The poplar leaves are floating towards us, from

the west. When the west winds blow in autumn, it means rainy days."

"Let 's forget that there is such a thing as rain, and look at the sun. What are you doing? Dressing a doll?"

He picked up a small garment as he spoke, a little cloak made of rich brocade of pale straw color, covered with tiny bunches of flowers.

"A doll, indeed! No. Do you think it pretty?"

"Yes, very; but what is it for, if not a doll? Are babies as small as that?"

Her eyes brimmed over with laughter, then she drew down her mouth with an assumption of severity, as she said: —

"It is a cloak for my little Jesus of Prague."

From the basket she drew, as she spoke, a plaster image representing a child holding up two fingers in the attitude of blessing. On the head was a crown.

"What do you do with it?" asked Grafton, looking with some wonder at the figure.

"Don't you know about him?" she asked in astonishment. "Oh, I must give you a tract telling of the marvelous cures he has performed; his worship is being spread everywhere. He has only to see a sick child, I mean the real one at Prague, and the illness disappears, and the child is well. I promised mine a new cloak if aunt Nora got well from a fever she had in August, and mamma bought me the brocade in Tours yesterday."

"Are you in earnest? Do you really believe

what you say?" asked Grafton, not quite sure that she was serious.

The quick color sprang to her cheeks.

"Why should n't I mean it? It is the truth," she answered coldly.

He leaned forward, and looked full into her eyes. In spite of her words, he half expected that some jest lay hidden beneath. He knew that there were people, even to-day, who believe in such miracles, but that Suzette, with her active mind and her ready intelligence, should be among them seemed to him impossible.

As for her, she was not herself to begin with. The thought that he was to leave her soon had set all her nerves quivering in self-protection. The sense that a great space lay between them had already distressed her, and now he seemed to be making the space vaster, more impassable by his words; still more again by his expression. His uplifted brows, a slight gleam in his eyes, as if he wanted to laugh, put her on the defensive. Should this alien dare mock at what had always been to her the support of her life? The very doubts and misgivings that had lately shaken her made her vehement, as if she felt some sting of remorse.

She held her head high, and her voice was unshaken, although she could not thread her needle, her hand trembled so.

"I see," she said, not waiting for him to speak. "My religion amuses you. I suppose that you, in your new country, have thrown off the old ties, and

scorn them; but let me tell you, monsieur, that I still believe in God, and please don't make fun of my faith, for it is all I have, and it is very, very dear to me."

Grafton was moved, not only by her words, but by the bitterness of her tone in speaking to him. His face fell, and for a moment he was quite still, leaning his cheek on his hand; then he said in a low tone: —

"You have hurt me, mademoiselle. I don't know what I have done to deserve your attack, but it has grieved me seriously."

Suzette was touched. The swift reaction had come, and she regretted her attitude, but she was hardly sure enough of herself to speak, and lower over her sewing bent her head.

"I cannot let you, *you* of all people, think of me as an unbeliever," Grafton continued, as she did not answer. "I should never sneer at any honest faith. I 'm not one of those who think that they alone are right; I don't want to be right alone. My faith in God is large enough for me to believe that He sends his word to us in all tongues. What have I said to make you think so badly of me?"

"You laughed at my little Jesus," said Suzette, laying a fold of silk over the plaster figure so as to hide it.

"No; I did not laugh at that. But I confess that I was surprised and shocked that you could believe in such toys!"

Grafton was fully roused now. He had been meek long enough. At all costs he must be loyal to his convictions. He went on impetuously: —

"Symbols like that were good for a race when it was in its infancy. Just as they teach babies to read by pictures of what words represent, so these images served their purpose to lead the half awakened mind to understand religion. Among many bad things, one of my compatriots said a good one, 'An honest God 's the noblest work of man.' And to my mind it is an insult to the Deity to think that he can be pleased by a gift fit for a child."

Suzette made no reply. As he spoke it began to dawn on her that his was a stronger, a more potent faith than hers; mistaken if you please, but of deep earnestness. She felt a little frightened at the storm she had raised.

Grafton took a few long, swinging steps up and down the court, then he stood looking down at her, with a power that drew her unwilling eyes to his face.

"You have driven me to this; you have compelled me to defend myself; and now it is only my right that you should hear me out."

"I am listening," she murmured.

"I suppose I have what you would call a serious nature, for I can never take things easily. I must see my duty plain and clear, and then it is easy enough to do; but the finding out what that duty is, there 's the hard thing. I was taught, like most

boys, I suppose, of my age, that the world was made in six days. When I was very young I accepted it as no more wonderful than the fact that the sun is stationary, and that we are the ones who move. Then I began my studies. I read scientific essays; I said to myself: 'Does the Bible lie?' And the one answer I got was, 'Yes; if we are bound to believe Genesis literally, it cannot be true.' I could not regard this lightly; it shook my ideas of life; I faced it with my whole might. I read every book on the subject that I could find; I went to hear sermons from men of every sect; I read the ancients and the moderns. One day two sayings of Marcus Aurelius stuck in my mind after I had closed the book: 'Nothing is evil which is according to nature,' and 'Live with the gods.' For the moment I felt that nature was my only God, and I began to live face to face with it. This was after I had chosen my profession. That was the first great step towards happiness in my life. I started with perhaps a pagan idea of my God; I think that I have found a divine one. To me his handwriting is on all his works, — man, beast, and inanimate nature. To me He literally rides on the whirlwind. His power and wisdom are so vast that we are but beginning to read the primer of his learning. Truth is the very element of our existence if we ever hope to fulfill his will. And that is what made me wonder when I saw your image; that is what troubles me now. That any one as good and noble as you cannot see that you are

offering an indignity to the Creator when you try to change the course of events marked out by Him; and after you have persuaded Him, as you think, to alter the swing of the universe, you reward Him by giving Him a plaster doll, dressed in brocade!"

Suzette's face had grown pale as she listened to the words that seemed like cruel blows of an iconoclast's hammer, shattering the idols of her faith. A terrible, remorseful undercurrent of agony warned her that she felt a dangerous sympathy with some of his thoughts. Here was no scoffer; this man, standing over her, as white and as moved as she, was no trifler. His bent brows, his eyes, stern and earnest, showed her the depth of his feelings; they dazzled her; she wanted to get away from them.

"I must not listen to you," she said at last in a tone so low as to be almost inaudible. "I am not fit to do battle for my church and the saints. They would suffer at my poor hands. Please go! You have troubled me; oh, how you have troubled me!"

"Mademoiselle — Suzette! Forgive me if I have wounded you. I was telling you what *I* believed, — I was not trying to shake you. But don't forget, that behind and above the saints, and the lesser parts of your faith, is God. And He is my God as well as yours. If we go far enough back we find the same fountain head. Do you understand me?"

She rose, and gathered her work up in her hands.

"Yes; I think that I understand, but I must not say any more. I am too shaken now to talk with you. You have said things that I have been taught all my life were from Satan."

"Let me help you, at least."

As he spoke, Grafton took up a bundle of what he thought was a soft bit of silk. In doing it the little image, the cause of all their agitation, became entangled in the stuff, and fell to the ground with a crash. The brittle plaster crumbled, and lay in bits at his feet.

Suzette gave one low cry, then she buried her face in her hands, and stood still. At the sight of her grief, sage and philosopher vanished; the lover remained. Grafton knelt and picked up the fragments.

"Please, please don't feel so badly," he implored her. "You shall have another. I will get you a marble one that can't break. Oh, do look at me, and say that you forgive me!"

She raised her head, and did as he had begged, but he found no comfort in her grief-laden eyes.

"I don't want another," she said slowly. "There are some things that can never be mended or replaced. My little Jesus is not the only thing broken to-day."

Grafton let fall again the bits that he had gathered up, and rose to his feet. There was a new dignity about the young girl; her grief was not of the kind to be kissed or smiled away; he saw that she was suffering deeply, and the conviction came

to him that he had wounded the creature dearest on earth to him.

"You won't say that you forgive me?" he asked again.

"Not yet; it would n't be true. In time it may come, but not to-day."

"Then I must go?"

"If you please."

There was a finality in her tone that forbade him to urge more. He could not even take her hand, for she was laden with her work. He stood looking after her in dumb distress, and when the last flutter of her dress had disappeared within, he turned on his heel and went rapidly away. As the garden gate closed behind him, Paddy lifted his head, and, seeing that he was abandoned, gave a succession of frantic barks that drew Monsieur Vernon from his uncongenial accounts, to see what the trouble was. He came out of the house with his usual cheery smile on his rosy face, ready for a gay word with Grafton, whom he expected to see. There was no one there, but Paddy digging fiercely beneath the gate. Monsieur Vernon opened it for him, and then came back to the table, looking down at the fragments of plaster on the gravel. He touched them with his foot, and then he stooped and picked up one of the pieces; it was a chubby hand, two of the fingers raised in the act of blessing. As he turned it over his face grew graver and graver. It seemed to be telling him that something had happened to dim the sunlight

of his home; the young man's abrupt departure, Suzette's absence, all spoke of some event.

Vain, egotistical, and somewhat foolish, this village poet might be, but kind and true. He loved his wife and child with all his soul, and the suspicion that trouble might be in store for them threw a shade of wistfulness on his face; tears shone in his eyes.

Is there any grief more touching than that felt by the parent for the child? You may say to yourself, if you have a child, "Every one must suffer; it is the common lot; it enlarges and perfects the character." And for yourself you may believe what you say, but for the one dearer than yourself, you shrink and tremble, and wish you might avert the pain by your own suffering; anything to save your darling.

Steadily and cruelly it began to dawn on Monsieur Vernon, as he stood there, that Suzette might have begun already to feel the thorns and the rough places on the life-road she had found so smooth until now. At that very moment she might be crying upstairs.

He walked along the terrace until he came beneath her window; it was closed. He called, but no answer came. A mother, with the same tender sympathy, would have taken the hint, but, manlike, he felt that he must *do* something. So he went to the door of her room and knocked. For a second there was no reply; then after the hardly

perceptible pause came her voice, sounding steady, but muffled.

"Who is it?"

"Oh, I only wanted to know if you cared to walk down and bring your mother home; I 'm going."

"No, thanks, papa; I 'm — I 'm busy about — something."

For a moment he stood irresolute, and then he turned sadly away.

Symbolist as he was, it did not occur to him then that the time had come to Suzette when the closed door meant something new in her life, and that from this day on, he must be content to stand without, not sure if there were tears or smiles behind it.

CHAPTER XII

SUZETTE had been right regarding the change in the weather, and all through the long night Grafton, unable to sleep, had lain and listened to the dash of rain against his window, and the savage roar of the wind swooping up the valley. The impression made by his conversation that afternoon grew more and more vivid as the hours went by. Up to this time he had felt for Suzette a strong, tender affection, which gave him pleasure, but which was in no great hurry to provoke a return. He had been willing to wait; he had been content to look forward with a calm satisfaction to the time when she would grow to care for him. Now all was changed. A love had suddenly made itself known, so imperious that he was powerless before its might. The young girl had become, not merely desirable, but the one, the only woman in the world for him. She was so true, so brave, so good. And he had hurt her! The thought drove him from his bed, and he wandered up and down his two rooms, while shutters slammed, trees creaked, and the wind roared without. Once he opened his window, and leaned out into the darkness. The rain stung his cheek as it was driven against it, and he could distinguish the sullen complaint of the river.

He had hurt Suzette; he had attacked her faith. And what did he know? Why had he thought himself so wise? Was the secret of the universe his, that he had dared set himself up as her teacher?

Some of his old, terrible doubts crowded in on him. He closed the window, and again paced up and down. Where was his boasted liberality, he asked himself? Was his obstinacy to prove a stumbling-block now, just at the threshold of happiness? Then a reckless mood held him for a moment. What did it all matter? Duty and morality were fine in their cold, abstract way, but they were intangible, indefinite goals, while Suzette was warm and real, well worth the gaining, even if he had to bend before a plaster image for her.

But as he said this to himself, it rang false in his own mind. She was too real herself not to see through any flimsy pretense, and, even if he could have brought himself to making it, would despise him for his attempted deceit. No; he would be true to his own standard, but he would gain her in spite of all. He would see her the first thing to-morrow. To-morrow? To-day, he corrected himself, looking at his watch, which pointed to the hour of five.

He fell asleep after this decision, and woke late, with a smile on his lips. He had been walking through a meadow with Suzette, and his right hand was grasping his left, which in the dream had been hers. But as he threw off the impression of the

vision, and opened his eyes, the black depression of the night came back with double force. He felt no energy left in him. He had meant to go to her at once, but now it seemed so useless.

Paddy tried to rouse him to some show of good-fellowship, but Grafton had only an absent-minded stroke to give his small friend. After his neglected breakfast he began once more to weigh the pros and cons of his decision to speak to Suzette at once. The storm had increased in fury, but it was neither wind nor rain which discouraged him. He was afraid to put his happiness to the touch, and yet the uncertainty was torture.

At last he could stand it no longer, and turning up the collar of his coat, and putting his hat firmly on his head, he set out, followed by Paddy, who plainly showed his disapproval of the weather by declining to dash on ahead in his usual gay fashion, chasing imaginary cats, but kept close at his master's heels.

His head bent, his obstinacy now his ally, not his enemy, Grafton fought his way up the road, until he stood by the garden gate. He rang the bell, and in a few moments a maid, with a shawl over her head, peered out.

"Mademoiselle?" she said in answer to his question, with an undisguised surprise at its want of etiquette. "She went to Tours this morning with monsieur, and madame is making her marmalades, so she cannot receive visits."

"Will mademoiselle be back by the evening train?"

"But no, monsieur, mademoiselle has gone into retreat for a week at the convent. Monsieur is coming home this evening."

Grafton turned on his heel, making no comment, and the maid, clutching at her throat in her endeavor to keep her shawl from flying away, closed the gate behind him.

He felt almost a childish horror for the rooms where he had suffered so acutely, and, notwithstanding a decided hint from Paddy to the contrary, pushed on to the uplands, where he had the pleasure of standing, buffeted by the gale, for twenty minutes, looking down on the roof of the Vernon house, and wondering which was her chimney.

Paddy bore this as long as he could, but he was unused to such vagaries on his master's part, and hardly understood the condition of his mind, so at last he ventured on a bark, and then a dig with his paw against Grafton's leg, which aroused him from his reverie.

"Why, you poor little beggar," he said, striding off, and realizing that the stout coat he wore was soaked through, "I 've been rather mean to make you uncomfortable, too."

They went home at a tremendous pace, and half an hour later it must be confessed that Grafton, under the pleasant influence of dry clothes, a soothing pipe, and the blood still racing through his veins after his exercise, began to feel more cheerful, and even to indulge in some rosy hopes as he sat smoking before his fire, Paddy on the rug

beside him, still unsatisfied with the condition of his pink toes, which he was examining minutely. For some reason it was better to think of Suzette in the convent at Tours than at home and unwilling to see him. He had a feeling, too, that it was fairer play to give her all the chances on her side. But he *would* win her yet, in spite of everything, he said, setting his jaw. He was in this happier mood, when a light tap was heard at the door, followed at once by Temple.

"Beastly day," he said, throwing his dripping ulster over a chair in the corner, and shaking the water from the rim of his felt hat. "The presbytery is like an ice-chest. The chimney smokes in my room, and so I 've come to you for a bit of comfort and whiskey."

"Take them both, and welcome," said Grafton, pulling himself to an upright position. "Do you want some water, or have you absorbed enough on your walk down?"

"There 's everything here that I want, thanks. Keep still, and I 'll look after myself," said Temple, going, with the air of one who knows the way, to a cupboard in the old black buffet. "Will you have some, too?"

"That 's not a bad idea; yes."

The next half hour passed in almost absolute silence. Both men were absorbed in their own thoughts, and beyond a stray remark or two to Paddy, or a request for a match to light a cigarette that had gone out from neglect, nothing was said.

"By Jove, did you hear that?" asked Temple, as a gust of wind shook the solid old building. "You 've no notion what a day it is. It took me twenty minutes to get here; every step was a fight."

"I 've been out," said Grafton.

"Where did you go? To the château?"

"No; I took a turn on the uplands."

There was another pause; then Temple, with the air of a person telling something important, said, "I dined there last night."

"Where?"

"With Madame Ernst."

"Well; anything new going on?"

"There was a deuce of a row because Ernst has made her invite some woman, a Madame de Lussac I think the name was, down here for a visit."

"Madame de Lussac!" exclaimed Grafton in some surprise.

"Yes ; do you know her?"

"She 's one of the best known women in Paris, Vienna, and St. Petersburg. You as diplomatist ought to know her. But how on earth does it happen that Ernst wants her, and the baronne objects?"

"That 's more than I can tell you. Only I learned from the talk at dinner that the Jew is master in his own way, and that his wife has a confounded nasty time of it."

"I can't imagine a gentleman making his wife receive the marquise against her will."

"We were speaking of *Ernst*," rejoined Temple, with a sneer.

"A letter for monsieur," said Madame Richer, coming in after such a gentle knock that it had not been heard. Grafton took it and looked at Temple.

"May I?"

"Of course."

He tore the envelope open, ran his eye over the contents, and saying, "Wait a moment, please; there 's an answer," sat down at his writing-table, and scribbled a few lines.

"Monsieur will dine here?" asked the landlady.

"No; I 'm going out. Is the man waiting?"

"Yes, monsieur."

While they talked, Temple had kept his eyes on the envelope which lay at his feet where it had fallen. He was devoured with a jealous curiosity to see the words on the sheet of note-paper lying face down on the table. They were few, but they would not have been pleasant reading for him.

"Dine with me this evening," they began abruptly. "I am all alone, and I want a lesson in American domesticity. Bring Paddy too. I adore him, the delicious Paddy. D."

"Going to the château?" asked Temple quietly.

"Yes," answered Grafton, wondering why he had accepted. He would have given much, now that he reflected, to be free to think and dream of Suzette.

"To go back to what we were saying," resumed Temple when they were alone again, "I don't see why you were surprised that this madame what-do-

you-call-her was going to the château. As far as I can see, every French woman is as bad as every other, only some are a little worse."

"That 's because your knowledge of them is very limited," replied Grafton, as the image of Suzette, with her untouched purity, came to him, and spurred him to espouse the cause of all her countrywomen for the moment. "We Anglo-Saxons can't understand a lot of their methods of thought, even when we 've come to speak their language fairly well. I believe, with all her freedom of speech, and certain suggestive ways, that Madame Ernst is really as unapproachable as any British matron, or New England schoolmarm."

"That shows how little you know the world, my boy," retorted Temple, not sorry to take a superior tone in his turn. "With a woman as rich as Madame Ernst it is a question of skill rather than of money. But although it takes a little longer, it is only a matter of time."

"I think you 're mistaken; I hope you are," said Grafton.

Temple looked up quickly at his tone. It had a sad, despondent ring in it, not the sharp ring of jealousy that he had thought to call out. It puzzled him, for it seemed to imply that Blake was either so deeply involved that he had no room left for minor bursts of temper, or that he was but a serious looker-on at a game that stirred only his impersonal emotions.

To Grafton himself the conversation had become

a desecration. It was ignoble to allow such words to enter where had lived his best and holiest thoughts of Suzette. Things that he had scarcely noticed formerly now assumed a new importance for him, as life began to take on the aspect with which it appeared to her. He wondered if it would do any good to speak seriously to Temple, but a fear of seeming to interfere, or put on an air of superiority, silenced him. The talk died away again, and when the young Englishman had gone it was time to dress.

Grafton had dreaded a long, solitary evening, but he was in no mood for society, and cursed the absence of mind which had made him accept Diane's invitation as he strode through the night to the château. The wind had gone down, but the rain fell steadily, with a depressing singleness of purpose, and when they were ushered into the hall Paddy shook himself on the rug to express his disgust. Diane was waiting for them, and the meeting between her and the dog was of a demonstrative nature, for Paddy felt for her a violent affection. There was a bond of sympathy between them.

"Now I want you to show me just how a good couple would pass the evening in Boston; and do you see that I 've dressed for my rôle of domestic joy?"

She made a turn as she spoke, and Grafton saw that she was in a simple gray frock, with white linen collar and cuffs, and her hair very plainly

dressed. There was something piquant in the contrast between her costume and her manner of holding herself; they did not seem to belong to the same person.

"Papa is away," she said as he gave her his arm to lead her to the dining-room, "and as a tête-à-tête dinner would not be quite the thing, even for me, Paddy is to be our chaperon."

With this remark she lifted the dog to a third chair placed for him, on which he sat through the meal with grave decorum, only sniffing once or twice at some peculiarly tempting morsel, for which good behavior he was rewarded with a solitary dinner after his betters had been served.

Had Grafton been less self-absorbed he would have remarked a difference between this dinner and the ordinary repasts served at the château. They were as a rule very handsome, in excellent taste, but with a suggestion of being turned out by machinery, utterly impersonal. This was due doubtless to the fact that Diane had nothing to do with the direction of the household. All affairs of this sort were in the hands of a competent major-domo, who took his orders directly from his master. On this particular evening, however, the arrangement of the flowers and fruit, the choice of the menu, a scarcely perceptible touch, marked the little feast with individuality.

"We are going to sit in the old wing this evening," announced Diane, as they left the room, followed by Paddy, licking his chops in a contented

state of mind. "I remember telling you that *he* had ruined the charm of the château, but papa's wing is just as it was; shabby, as you 'll see, still it has a charm for me."

"I 've always wondered what this part was like," said Grafton, as they turned into a long passage-way.

"Now you are to be introduced to my great-grandmother's boudoir, exactly as she left it. You like it, don't you?" asked Diane, as she opened the door of a room, not large, but prettily proportioned, and furnished with Louis XVI. sofas and chairs, white wood covered with hand embroidery of small flowers powdered over a white silk background. The walls were paneled with Watteau-like scenes, not by the hand of the great artist himself, but by that of his nephew, as Diane explained. A fire burnt brightly in the wide chimney-piece, two Dresden china lamps lighted up the gay apartment, placed one on each side of the hearth. The tables supporting them were the only touches in the room suggesting the nineteenth century, or rather one of the tables, — the one covered with the day's newspapers; the other held a useful-looking work-basket, not so characteristic of our times. The single window was deeply sunk in the walls, and a heavy curtain was drawn before it. Paddy went straight up to this curtain, and gave a low growl.

"Lie down," said Grafton sternly. "How dare you, sir?"

The dog slunk to the rug indicated by his master's hand, but his feelings were not to be smothered in this way, and he began a series of internal scoldings, as he lay with his sharp nose betwixt his front paws, his keen eyes fixed in the direction of the window.

"Did he have little thunder-storms in his little insides?" asked Diane, seating herself by the work-table, and motioning towards the other with her hand. "There, you see I remembered everything necessary for a domestic evening. Pretend that we are the most model couple in Boston; you would n't go to your club for worlds; I could not be dragged to a ball. Now, light your cigarette, and read me the news while I sew."

The baronne had borrowed her maid's basket, and as she took out a bit of plain sewing the weeks came back to her when she had worked so hard to prepare for Paris; she had not touched a needle since. A sigh escaped her. The evening so far was not as amusing as she had hoped. Something seemed to be troubling her guest. The dinner had been far from gay, even with the assistance of Paddy, but she had laid that down to the presence of the servants. Now they were alone, and the dullness still remained.

Grafton held out the box of cigarettes to her, but she shook her head.

"You are no actor; I 'm sure Boston wives don't smoke. Begin your paper. I 'm making a shirt for you."

He smiled as she bent over her sewing, and began dutifully to pick out any items that might interest her. But soon he held the paper before him and saw nothing on its pages. This false air of home hurt him. This was not what he wanted; it was the real thing; he could not play at it.

How long he had remained quiet he could not have told, when a sudden crash aroused him, accompanied by an excited bark from Paddy. Diane had thrown her basket into a distant corner, with a twist of her mouth half a laugh, half a pout.

"Now I 'm sure I 'm not cut out for domesticity. Of all dull things! For the love of God, give me a cigarette, and we 'll have a game of billiards."

"With all my heart," said Grafton, springing up, glad to be able to pull himself together. She lighted her cigarette at his, rang the bell to order lights in the billiard-room, and led the way to the other wing again.

Paddy, forgotten for the moment, made another dive at the heavy curtain before the window, behind which he disappeared for a few moments, and then, emerging with a satisfied expression, trotted off to join his hostess.

"I want you to do me a favor next Saturday," said Diane abruptly, as she chalked her cue.

"I am your slave."

"Be here at about four o'clock, and show me all the devotion in your power. I don't mean the kind you 've shown me this evening, but something stirring. I 've a reason."

"Which is?" asked Grafton, knocking the balls round.

"That Madame de Lussac is to be thrust down my throat for three days. She wrote me asking for an invitation over Sunday, which *he* has insisted on my giving. So I want her to see that she can have *him* as much as she wants; that I have amusements of my own."

This was Thursday. It didn't much matter what he promised for a week, he reflected. After that time he would not be so free to promise, for did not Suzette's retreat end in a week?

"Of course I 'll do as you ask," he said, feeling for the first time a shade of interest in the conversation.

A woman in his place would have followed one of two courses, probably. Either she would have been unable to hide the agitation of her mind, and would have made a confidant of her companion, or she would have seen and appreciated Diane's plan for a little comedy, and would have acted her part therein. Grafton, being a man, did neither, but let his own feelings engross him, and would have been as much surprised if he had known of Diane's half angry, half amused mortification that he had not played his rôle to please her as if she had reproached him bitterly for having worn ordinary evening dress, and not appeared arrayed in the costume of a harlequin. He had been unconscious of any lack of responsiveness on his part, and now, with the same masculine naïveté, brightened up as he became more interested.

"Why do you dislike Madame de Lussac? She seems to be a general favorite in her world."

"I don't dislike her as a woman. In fact, I rather like her, and find her amusing. It 's because of the idea I have of her and my husband that makes me furious at her daring to ask to be invited here."

Diane had perched herself on the corner of the table, and sat swinging her high-heeled slippers, forgetting the proposed game in the absorbing nature of her topic.

"Don't you believe that she may be one of those women who like to skim over thin places, and make themselves talked of, but who are really all right?"

Diane laughed. "Ah," she cried, "you have caught the jargon they always talk about her. Her admirers are forever telling you how clever the poor, dear marquise is; she looks so superbly dressed, and yet her maid makes all her clothes. I told one of them once that the maid must be a gold mine, for not only can she make Doucet frocks, but emerald necklaces, and strings of pearls, and smart little broughams and victorias. No; she 's as clever as she is pretty, and knows how to get admiration from Christians, and money from Jews. She does n't pay any twelve per cent either."

"If I were your husband you should n't be allowed to receive a woman you put down so low."

"Ah, you see you are not my husband, and my lord and master has different ideas from you Ameri-

cans. But to return to my little plan. I care for the baron as much as I do for *that;*" she flicked the ash from her cigarette as she spoke; "but it makes me angry to think that Odile de Lussac imagines me poked down here in a country hole, with not a soul to show me any attentions. That is the reason I want you and Temple to act the devoted lovers while she 's here."

"Ah! Temple, too?" asked Grafton, making a famous carom.

"Yes, of course, Temple, too."

"Do you know I think he 's rather dangerous? Now I 'm safe enough, as you have probably discovered; but Temple is a different sort."

"Yes; a very different sort," assented Diane in a dry tone. "I think that you are made of nicely painted kid, stuffed most artistically with bran."

Grafton laughed. "Well," he rejoined, "the same thing can't be said of Temple. He 's stuffed with something more like gunpowder, and he 's a nice fellow, too. I think you 'd better let him alone."

"What am I doing to him?"

"You are playing with matches very near him."

"Then what he needs is a bath. After next Monday I 'll dip him in the river to damp his ardor, and tell him he knows all the French he 's ever likely to."

"You are rather cruel, you know, as I told you the other evening," said Grafton, taking a place near her, and lighting a fresh cigarette from hers.

As he did so, the thought occurred to him that they two were practically alone in the great, silent house, and he wondered if she would have been as reckless and imprudent with Temple as she was with him. Her eyes were looking full into his as he drew a long breath at his cigarette, and by this light seemed nearly black.

"And I told you that I could be kind," she answered slowly.

"Be kind in the right place, then," he said, standing up to take his leave, "and remember that you may be playing the mischief with Temple. He appears much older than he is; really he 's only a boy. Where 's Paddy?"

Paddy emerged from under an ottoman, winking and stretching. He showed unbounded enthusiasm at the notion of going home, and ran joyfully to the front door. Diane accompanied them, and begged Grafton to take the lantern held for him by one of the servants, unless he would like the man to carry it for him.

"I 'll take the lantern, if you want me to, but really I don't need any one to take care of me. Good-night."

He lifted his hat, and took her hand, looking up at her as she stood in the open door.

"Goot-naight," she answered in English, with a little laugh at her own pronunciation.

Then she turned away, and as she went slowly to her room she thought, "No, he 's no kid doll, but the matter must be that there 's some one else."

CHAPTER XIII

THERE are no more inveterate gossips under the sun than the over-fed, underworked servants in a great house. Thus in twenty-four hours after Diane's return from the hunt a rumor was flying busily about the hamlet, and Madame Richer caught a hint here, another hint there, from the various domestics who dropped in of an afternoon to take a drop of wine and play a game of billiards or dominoes at the Silver Crescent.

"What 's that I hear about poachers?" she asked, with a careless yawn, as she tidily dusted one of the little tables, before which were seated the coachman and the head gardener from the château.

"Of course what we say is far from being absolutely correct," returned the gardener, a cautious man, who never made any statement without qualifying it, an attribute which may have been his by inheritance, or which he may have gained from the unceasing struggle with the elements involved in his calling. When asked if his vegetables promised well, he would shake his head sadly, and reply: "What can I tell? If the drought spares them, the rain drowns them, poor things. To make 'em grow well takes more than human powers." This

speech answered two purposes; first, if he met with any failures he had something to support him in his trial; second, if all went well, as it generally did, he had an excuse for his habitual attitude of being only a little lower than the angels, and a good bit higher than his fellow beings.

"Ah, Louis is right there, madame," chimed in the coachman, a rotund individual, who ruled his master and mistress with a rod of iron as far as stable matters were concerned, but who was as meek as Moses with his own class, almost timid, indeed.

"Yes," he repeated, "Louis is right there. I am told there 's them who pretend to say that nothing is correct in this world; even figures lie sometimes."

"Ah, Monsieur Pierre will always have his joke," said the landlady, showing her fine row of glistening teeth. "But, as you were saying? About the poachers?"

She had not seen René for a long time. His stealthy, secret visits, sometimes made by night, sometimes by appointment at some lonely spot, had been discontinued of late; indeed, ever since the curé had told her of his being in difficulties, she had seen him but twice, and had grown thin and pale from the suspense.

"Yes. We were going to tell you about what took place last evening; at least, it was just before dinner, if that may be called evening."

"Yes, yes, Master Louis, go on."

"It happened this way. I had stepped into the kitchen for a word with the cook about some quinces I have ready for preserving, when who should dash in but Mademoiselle Thérèse, madame la baronne's maid, with the pink coat on her arm that my lady had worn to the hunt, — or, it looked like the same, but I would n't swear it was; no, I would n't swear so."

"You are always sensible, Louis," said the coachman, pouring out a second glass of cognac, feeling no doubt that thoroughly to look his position his nose should be ruddier than the cherry. "Never swear to anything that don't bring in money."

"Here 's to you, Pierre, for a man of sense," returned the flattered gardener, clinking glasses. "But to resume my tale, as I said, Thérèse rushed in with a pink coat over her arm, in a very excited state, and showed a rent in the sleeve to the seamstress, who was standing in the door. 'See there, do you think that can be mended so it would n't show on the stage?' she asked. 'I think so,' said the other, looking at it, with her eyes screwed up. 'Well, if you can do it nicely for me, I 'll give you a quarter of what it will bring from an actress I know at Tours, who buys ladies' clothes to act in.' 'How did it get so torn,' said I; 'madame was n't thrown, was she?' Then came a great to-do. Madame had come into her room all white, and had ripped the coat off, and thrown it on the floor, and stamped on it with her riding-boots, and the

tear came from the spur, — or, at least, Thérèse thought it did. And madame had tossed it to her, and said, 'Burn it! Never let me see it again. Do you understand?' And then she had sat down on the sofa, and had cried and sobbed, and then laughed until Thérèse thought she was going into a fit. And when she got quieter she said she had been frightened by a poacher in the new piece of woods, but she had got away, and that Thérèse must not say a word, for if the story got out the poacher might escape. So Thérèse came down as soon as madame was quiet, and that 's all I know."

"Then you can't tell how he looks, or anything about him?" asked Madame Richer, keeping on with her knitting. If the two men had been observant, they would have seen that every third stitch was dropped, and that the poor stocking would never be worn.

"Now it 's my turn," said Pierre. "This case must be taken in order, and we must proceed as if we were judges."

The landlady shuddered.

"I 'm not as much up in the law as some, but to my mind poaching and scaring a lady is not let off easy as a rule. No, not easy at all. Is that your opinion too, Louis?"

"It might be if circumstances fitted," replied the wary one.

"And what he and I call not easy is pretty hard; *pretty hard*. Eh, Louis?"

Louis winked in a knowing but uncompromising

manner over the edge of his glass, and limited his spoken word to "Proceed, Monsieur Judge."

"To answer your question, madame, as to how he looked, I can tell one thing, certain."

"Which is?" The knitting-needles rattled against each other now.

"Which is that whoever the unknown poacher may be, he is of size and strength. And if you ask how I know, I 'll tell you. The side of the baronne's horse was all cut and jagged from the spur, and his mouth was cut on the right side. Now from that I can tell just as certain as if I was a prophet that this man caught the horse's bit with his right hand, as it might be, *so*."

With this he bent forward, and seized the long, grizzled moustache of his friend on the right side of his mouth.

"Now, Louis, if you 'll kick against your chair with your left foot, always supposing it has a spur on the heel, madame will get an idea of how matters were."

Louis obligingly made an effort to obey, but as the coachman in his dramatic frenzy immediately hauled as hard as he could at the moustache, the representation came quickly to an end, with a smothered yell, and the expression of "Holy name of a pipe, can't you tell how the man looked without murdering me?"

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," said Pierre, meek and apologetic now that the histrionic effluvia had somewhat evaporated. "I only

wanted to explain to madame that the man must have been stout and strong to hold on to the horse like that, for I promise you the baronne did n't sit idle all the time."

"And what could they do to the man if he was caught?"

The two men looked at each other. Then they each drank solemnly, draining the last drop in their respective glasses. After this ceremony Pierre, in his character as the more impetuous of the two, drew his finger across his throat in a ghastly way, glancing at Louis for confirmation. The cautious Louis kept his unbroken silence, but repeated his former noncommittal wink, and then rose as if the session were over as far as his interest in it went. He took a piece of two francs from his pocket, and, while Madame Richer was counting out the change, stood on his right leg like a reticent stork, rubbing his left foot against it, which he had drawn from the sabot resting in place on the floor. Pierre, in the mean time, was struggling to introduce his finger inside his waistband, where it was presumed that his fortune lurked, but his lounging attitude making his protuberant paunch still more protuberant, he rose reluctantly to his feet, extracted a leather wallet with every appearance of being in the first stages of apoplexy, and, having selected the most disreputable bit of silver, presented it to his hostess with an air of munificence. This ceremony over, the worthies saluted the comely widow and went their ways.

She gathered up the empty glasses, wiped the table again, and, looking round to make sure that no other customer was waiting, took her way into the adjoining kitchen. She was sure that the unknown poacher was her boy, her René, who had never brought her anything but trouble, and whom she therefore loved, with the foolish inconsistency of women, twice as passionately as if he had been steady and grave. In the midst of her anxiety she was conscious of a thrill of pride that it was her boy who had been spoken of as so strong and big. He was that; the last time she had seen him, she had exulted in his broad shoulders, his gleaming eyes, and the gay smile which showed his teeth, as white as her own. Since the departure of the two men, the little inn room had remained empty, and she had time to think. As she washed the glasses with her usual care her mind was busy. René must be saved; he must be sent away from this land where poaching could be punished with — Ah! she could still see the fat, stubby hand of the coachman, as he had drawn it across his throat; she must forget it, or she could not think. Yes; he must be sent away, but it would cost a great deal of money, and just now she had so little. The vintage had exhausted her credit, and if she sold her wine now, it would be at a loss. She had been less prudent and thrifty, too, this summer, for the curé had made her nervous with his secret commands, and she had lost so much time spying about, all to no good. She was as wise as she had

been six months before. Then all at once a ray of hope filtered into her mind. It was her own fault that the promised money to take poor René away had not been earned. She had been blind and unable to see what was going on under her very nose. The first chance she had she would carry evidence to the curé. But she must be careful to give it a coloring of truth. She could not, for instance, run at once to the presbytery, and tell her story; no, she must wait her moment, which would come. Had she been clever she could have earned her money three times over already, but she had been so stupid that she had imagined she must wait. Bah! If you were sure of a thing, of what use to wait until it was pushed down your throat? She was sure that her lodger and the baronne were more to each other than was generally supposed. The curé was of her opinion, too, for was he not always urging her on, and frightening her about her boy? Well, the holy man should get what he wanted, and that before long. Monsieur Blake was kind and nice, but what was he compared to her René? She could have found it in her to poison him if it would have saved her son at that minute, but she was only asked to find him out in a little fault? For a man, what was it? So small a thing! Only a feather in his cap. As to the baronne's part in all this, on that she did not dwell long. If a rich lady, with everything in the world to suit her, chooses to toss her cap over the mill, she must take the consequences; with poor

girls, who have to fight against everything single-handed, it was another matter. One of that kind she would save; but the baronne? Bah!

She began to get Grafton's dinner with the feeling that she might be going to do him a good turn, and cursed her fate that she had not crept after him when he first went out, so as to know where he had been. But a chance would come before long. Fool! Literal fool that she was, not to have seen clear what the curé was after long ago. Once it occurred to her that perhaps harm might come to Monsieur Blake from her actions; but she dismissed this idea with a quick shrug. For her boy, she was going to tell — not a lie, but a little fib. And if she chose to involve herself in wrong-doing, whose business was it? It was all very fine to talk so much about paradise and purgatory, and — well, other places, too. But they were very vague to her mind, and this life, with its joys and fears, very distinct. She 'd take the consequences; she had no hesitation.

When Grafton came in, just before his dinner, she watched him closely from behind her curtained window, and was worried to see his downcast expression; it might mean a break with the baronne, and that would spoil all.

The next morning she saw the marquis and the baron drive by in a close carriage, with two trunks on top, to the early train towards Paris. An hour later she saw the old-fashioned calash, drawn by Monsieur Vernon's horse-of-all-work, which was

taking Suzette to the train for Tours, go lumbering along on the Amboise road. If her lodger went out this morning there was but one person for him to visit, but unluckily for her the wind and rain were too violent for any human being to venture out; she must wait. Thus, busied in her kitchen, she did not notice him when he started on his wild walk, and it was only when he had come back, drenched to the skin, that she knew of his expedition. Then, indeed, she cursed her carelessness bitterly. She began to feel a spirit of defiance towards him; he was doing his best to escape her, was he? Well, she would be even with him yet.

Later in the day the messenger from Diane, with the invitation to dinner, arrived, dripping wet, and ready to sit awhile and sip something comforting. He told Madame Richer all that she wanted to know. The baron had run up to Paris, and the marquis had gone to Orleans for his annual visit to an old hunting friend, and would be away at least a week. The head cook had leave for two days to visit his wife in Tours, and the baronne was all alone. Madame Richer sent her compliments to the under-cook, a girl of her own training, and said that she would come up for an hour's talk as soon as she had finished some work, for it was a delight to be able to go to the château without coming in contact with that conceited chef, who set her nerves on edge. The first step being thus arranged for, as soon as it was dark she called Denis, and telling him where she was going, and

enjoining him not to be cheated by any customers who might drop in during her absence, for she might be late, she had so few chances for a good gossip, she threw a full black cloak over her shoulders, and concealed her head with its hood. She then opened her door and stepped out into the gloom. Her first move was to go directly to the presbytery, where she knocked at the kitchen entrance. The maid ushered her at once into the curé's study. He was bending over a book on architecture, and so absorbed was he that the landlady's presence did not rouse him. He was tracing the outline of an arch with his hooked forefinger, when Madame Richer coughed; then he raised his eyes, and showed some annoyance.

"Why could n't you knock? I don't like to have people stealing in on me like thieves," he said, in a querulous tone.

"I beg monsieur le curé's pardon, but I thought Lizette knocked. I have come to say but one word."

"And that is?"

"That I think all will be as monsieur le curé wishes to-morrow."

"As I fear, my good woman, not as I wish."

"As monsieur le curé *fears* then," she corrected herself, with a fine glance of scorn from her black eyes.

"You may come here early, then, to tell me what you know."

"I will be here very early, if I have anything

to tell, and I think I shall have something. I *know* I shall have something," she added, in her own mind.

With a bare word of politeness she left the priest, once more bending over his book, and again stepped out into the gloomy rain.

Madame Richer was a favorite at the château, and received a warm welcome from the various servants gathered together in the spacious kitchen.

"You will stay and dine?" said the vice-cook, reveling in her brief authority.

"I can't, thank you; I must keep my eye on that cabbage-head of a Denis. He 's not to be trusted alone. No, I 'm here only for a half hour, and then I must be at home by the time the villagers begin to drop in."

During the half hour's chat, Madame Richer learned that dinner was ordered for two, and that the Louis XVI. boudoir had been warmed for the evening.

The cook became more absorbed as the critical hour drew nearer, not to say a trifle cross, and her sharp remarks gradually emptied the kitchen of all but the landlady, who was obligingly lending a helping hand. All at once she gave a little start, just as the priestess of the range was engaged in a difficult operation, demanding unwinking attention.

"Don't stop, for the love of heaven, or you 'll spoil all; but I must run."

"Wait a second, and I 'll light you to the gate."

"I can't, my dear; it 's later than I thought. Good-night."

With a twist of her hand she had flung her cloak round her shoulders, and when the cook turned her red face from the fire, the room was empty, and she heard the clang of the outer gate. But, although it clanged, Madame Richer was within, not without, its barrier, and after a second's hesitation she found her way along a dark corridor, which led to the old wing, went rapidly up a staircase in the wall, and only paused when she had gained the landing. She knew the château from roof to foundation, for in the old, frugal days, she had been often called to help in the annual cleaning, or on the rare occasion when the marquis entertained a few friends after a hunt, she it was who prepared the dinner in her quality as village cook. Very gently she lifted the latch, and pushed open the door about half an inch. She put her eye to the crack, and saw only the dimly lighted gallery. Then, with a steady step, she passed along to the third door, which she opened boldly. If any one happened to be there she had her word of explanation all ready, but the room was empty. The fire had been lately started, and the smoke still rolled up in great, round columns. The lamps were lighted, and the curtain drawn before the deep-set window. Without looking round, or wasting any time, Madame Richer stepped behind the curtains, and proceeded to make herself comfortable. She rolled her cloak up for a seat,

and leaned her head against the side of the deep embrasure; then she waited.

She had two frights; the first was when one of the servants, a footman, came in to look at the fire, and, to her terror, put his hand inside the curtain, to adjust its folds, doubtless disarranged by her as she entered. But only his hand intruded on her hiding-place, although she wondered that he did not hear her heart beat. Soon after the door was flung open, and she heard the baronne rustle in, followed by Grafton. Then it was that her hopes died away, for Paddy would betray her. She heard his growl of discovery; she heard his master's command to lie down, and still she was too frightened to do more than bite her lips, to keep back a scream. After that all went well. The absolute innocence of the conversation did not trouble her at all, for she had made up her mind what to say, for her boy's sake. It was not facts that she wanted. It was an opportunity to invent them. So she sat in her corner very comfortably, until the crash of Diane's work-basket gave her another slight start. Then, to her relief, she heard the proposal made of a game of billiards, and in another minute she was free. No! Not yet, for Paddy had kept his own counsel, and as his master left the room, he slipped behind the curtain to see what was hidden there. He was very fond of his landlady, in a patronizing sort of way, and although he hardly understood why she chose such an odd place in which to pass her evening, he for-

gave it, brushed his cold nose against her cheek, and trotted away on his four legs, much wiser than his two-legged superiors.

Getting out was a simple enough thing, for the old wing had its own door fastened on the inside, out of which she crept without detection. As she walked swiftly down the avenue, she felt elated. She had almost earned René's freedom. The next day she would claim the money from the curé, and when she had it sure and snug she would find out her boy, and send him away to begin again. Then the bitter thought came to her that all her trouble was to have for its aim an eternal separation. Oh, why was such suffering sent to *her?* What had she done to deserve all her trials? One wrong, not her fault, and her whole life spoiled. It was unjust.

She opened the door of the inn parlor and stepped brusquely in. There was only one customer, at sight of whom her eyes grew eager, and her throat felt parched. He was at a little table, and Denis was standing near him listening, with his stupid mouth wide open in a grin. He started, the grin faded at the sight of his mistress, and he at once assumed his humble manner.

"The gentleman had asked for a room; he had put him in No. 5; was that right?"

"Yes, right enough," she answered shortly. "Go you to bed now. I 'll sit up for Monsieur Blake, and you must be off bright and early in the morning."

"As soon as I 've fixed the table," said Denis, "and given you the money I took in to-night. There were only two customers, and they had the table three hours; that made — that made" — Here Denis scratched his head, which was never very strong, and sums always upset it.

"Never mind the money to-night. Put the cloth over the table, and then go to bed."

As she spoke Madame Richer went through the open door into the kitchen beyond. She took off her cloak, hung it up, and then buried her head in its damp folds, biting the cloth with her teeth to keep back the cries, half of joy, half of sorrow. When he was away from her, she could keep up her courage by the exasperation caused by René's recklessness; but when he was before her, when she saw his handsome, laughing, dare-devil face, as she had just seen it, lighting up the corner behind the unconscious Denis's back as he had shaken his head roguishly at her, then she only knew that he was her boy, her son. She would give her life for him; she would give half of it to keep him near her, and she was working to put the world between them.

When she was a little calmer she returned to the parlor, where Denis, fascinated by the stranger, was lingering over his task. Madame Richer twitched from his hand the corner of the cloth that he was clumsily arranging, without a word, but with such a flash from her eyes that he put up his elbow as if to ward off a blow, and fled stum-

bling from the room. Before the sound of his heavy tread, taking two steps at every stair, had died away, René had burst into a hearty laugh, and had jumped up and folded his mother in his arms.

"I don't wonder the Silver Crescent is flourishing with such a captain as you at the helm," he said between his kisses. "Your face is better as a room-clearer than a regiment of soldiers. Aren't you glad to see me? What makes you cry, old lady?"

"Oh, my boy, my boy! Glad? Yes, God knows I am, but sorry, too."

"But I have good news for you."

"How can anything be good? Wasn't it you who — oh, I can't hint it even — the baronne — you know."

A sullen scowl drew down over his laughing face.

"Has she told? Or did he?"

"He? Who 's he?"

"Your lodger here."

"Monsieur Blake? What has he to do with it?"

"Ah then, they don't know all." He gave a long sigh of relief. "He 's kept his word, as he promised. But how do they know it was me?"

"They don't, René. It was I who suspected when I heard the talk. But tell me what you mean about Monsieur Blake."

She had placed her chair close to his, and as he told his version of the encounter in the forest, she kept his hand between hers, smoothing it from time to time. As he ended triumphantly with

Grafton's promise, and his hope to begin a new and better life far away, she let her head fall on his shoulder.

"And I am to be left. I, who am growing old. Oh, if you were a woman, you 'd know what it meant to be able to rest your head, as I 'm doing now, on some one you belonged to. You 'd know what it meant to look forward, and think of the time when strangers would close your eyes. Good news for you, yes; but death news for me."

"Oh mother, mother, you 'll break my heart! Why do you say such things? You are young still, and when I 've earned a little home, I 'll send for you, and you shall have another Silver Crescent out yonder. Why do you say such things?"

"Perhaps because it is like the music from paradise to hear you answer me. Because I 'm giving up all I have when I say good-by to you, and I shall want some words of comfort to keep me from despair when you are gone."

"Listen, mother. You talk so because you have no confidence in me. No, let me go on. I understand, for I never had any in myself before. But when that gentleman struck me as if I was a man, not a dog to be kicked; when he set my shoulder, and touched me just as I 've seen gentlemen among themselves, and spoke to me in a way I can't describe, but on a level somehow, so that it took away all my wish to grind him down, why I felt that there was a place where I could get another chance. He won't send me to his country,

and I don't wonder. He called me a — a — well, something he said they had too many of out there" —

"A gardener?" suggested his mother.

"No, I don't think so; but it doesn't signify."

"No, it doesn't signify; nothing does any more. Listen, René. You know as well as I do why I 've kept you a secret from all the world here. You know why I 've pretended to be a widow, and lived a lie — not one that harmed any one, to be sure, but a lie — for years?"

"Yes, mother, I know." The young fellow reddened, and drooped his eyes as he replied.

"It was all done to be respectable. Well, what I want to say is that I don't believe that there is any such thing as respectability in the world. Look at us here! The curé trying to trap the baronne, and using me because he can frighten me. Is that respectability? And the baron, the fox, who is using the curé to gain his own ends — what I can't say, but I 'll swear they are not *respectable;* and the baronne, with all the money she wants in the world, no poverty driving her, her life full of pleasure, acting as bad as bad can be with our young gentleman, — is she respectable? But because I 'm poor, and unprotected, I must be driven from all I used to love, I must give up living near my mother and sisters when they were alive, and I was young, to make people think I 'm respectable. And now you are going away from me, all for that, all for that! Oh, why can't we find a world

where we can be real, and live so as to show ourselves, and not be frightened all the time for fear we 're not respectable?"

Madame Richer had risen in her excitement, and was walking about the room moving chairs here and there, half lifting them, and then letting them fall again with a crash. René watched her, growing quieter as she grew more vehement. When she paused, and sat down in a corner away from him, he came close to her, and with his hand on her shoulder began to speak.

"Mother, I 'm beginning to think" —

"Take your hand away," she interrupted. "It makes my heart cold to think how I shall cry for a touch of it when you are far away. I can't bear it!"

He withdrew it, and went on.

"I 'm beginning to have new ideas. I 've had them since that gentleman seemed to think there might be a chance for me, since he did n't act as if I 'd killed a man instead of a rabbit. I can't say it right, but it was all the way he looked at the rabbit. So I 've begun to feel that respectability may come from inside us, not all outside, and that if I find a place where they think me better than a rabbit or a partridge I can begin inside to get respectable. Do you see?"

"Yes, I think so; I see that I love you more with every word you say. Oh René, why must I seem to be ashamed of the only creature I love? Why can't I be proud of you?"

"You shall be yet," he broke out impetuously, when he suddenly paused at the sound of a hand on the latch.

"It is Monsieur Blake," said his mother, going towards the door to open it, her mind beginning to feel that she owed him a debt of gratitude too deep for words. Up to this moment she had been too absorbed in René to think of Grafton's part in his rescue. His face was worn and pale as he stepped into the light, for his nerves were unhinged by his constant thought of Suzette, all the stronger for the brief moment of diversion, and he felt the want of sleep. But when he saw who was with his landlady his eyes were lighted up with a kindly smile.

"He is my son," said Madame Richer briefly, but with a dramatic gesture as she touched her breast.

"Oh, ho! So that 's the reason you knew who I was, and how to find the Silver Crescent? Well, have you told your mother our plan?"

"Yes, monsieur," replied René, smiling brilliantly.

"But we — that is — you must be quick," said the mother, breathing rapidly. "The story is out, and they will — ah, they will" — Her voice died away as she thought of that terrible hand of the coachman.

"Who told?" asked Grafton sternly.

"Madame la baronne — or no, she said they were not to tell, for fear he 'd escape. She wants to catch him."

"I don't think there 's the least danger of that, but it may be better to act promptly, just the same. We 'll take the morning train to Paris, and there you 'll be safe enough, for I 'll leave you in good hands."

There was a moment's silence. The poor mother was struggling to speak a word to thank him, to tell him that she did not deserve his kindness, but something caught at her throat when she thought of the separation coming so soon. She could only catch her breath in quick, strangling gasps. She could not even turn away, but must stand fixing her grief-burdened eyes on her boy. René drew his hand across his face, and then lifted it with a motion simple but full of force. He smiled no longer, and some of the reckless bearing seemed to fade out, perhaps forever, as he stood pointing upward.

"Monsieur, and mother, hear me. I feel something new working in me. I am a man, not a boy. What I say I mean. And I swear by God and all the saints that if I live you will be proud of me yet. There is no room for me here, but he says there is plenty over yonder, and I will be worthy of the chance given me. May God help me to keep my oath."

CHAPTER XIV

Odile de Lussac had not thrust herself into Diane's house from any caprice. She had been pushed there by an overwhelming fear. Up to the time of her first acquaintance with Ernst she had been accustomed to dealing with one type of men. There were numerous varieties of this type, but they all belonged to the same class. So, being a clever woman, she had made these men her study, and had grown to regard them as pawns on a chess-board, always to be reckoned with according to some rule. Now Ernst appeared like the strange knight, in taking unaccountable and unprepared-for leaps. He had impressed her with his power, and brought to bear on her the same force that had raised him from the unknown son of an obscure Jew to one of the best advertised men in Paris. She did not understand him. There was a tinge of the East in his character that frightened her Western materialism. Something mystic and occult lurked beneath his conventional exterior when he was with her, and made her dread a false step in her dealings with him.

All through the summer, ever since she had left Paris, he had written to her, and for some reason, inexplicable to herself, she had answered his

letters, telling him of her movements. In this way he had met her twice as she was making some journey by railway from one watering-place or château to another, and although they had never been alone on these occasions he had assumed an air of ownership that worked on her nerves, and kept her from sleeping; for she hated the man. She was gradually losing her self-command, and the mere thought of him threw her into a panic. Then, when he began to write as if their marriage were a mere question of time, and spoke of the religious part of the affair being as good as settled, and of Diane as playing into their hands on the legal question, the imminence of her danger gave her calmness, and she had looked matters full in the face.

In the first place, nothing on earth would induce her to marry him; he was distasteful to her. At the same time she was afraid to anger him. Why? She could not have given a good reason. He had nothing compromising from her. Her letters might have been read by the whole world, and beyond the mere fact of being in correspondence they would reveal nothing but an insignificant friendship, if the word be not too dignified to use. But the fact remained that she was losing her joy in life, that she had begun to dread the long, wakeful night hours, and worse than all, — the last straw, — that these worries were beginning to tell on her looks, and she was losing her phenomenal freshness. She decided to see for herself how the land lay, and so,

having received the permission, wrung from Diane, to present herself at Beaulieu, she found herself leaving the carriage that had been sent to meet her at the station, and ascending the château steps, one cold, brilliant autumn afternoon. The baron had run to open the coupé door, and on the open porch were the baronne, and two young men, one of them the disturbing cause of her visit. Diane met her with more cordiality than she had expected. In fact the warmth in her voice surprised Diane herself, but it was hard for her to break the habits of generations, and not welcome a guest fittingly. The first words spoken, however, the hostess was merged in the woman, who showed a true feminine quality in keeping the marquise in the dazzling afternoon sun, as they sat on the wide stone step, where tea was served to them. Diane was in a shooting-dress, and looked her best. The rough cloth, cut by the smartest of London tailors, showed her supple figure to advantage; the short skirt brought into prominence a pair of enchanting ankles, encased in gaiters, over small, stout boots, that did not hide the arch of her instep or the pretty lines of her foot; the fresh air had brought a bright color into her cheeks, and her deep eyes shone with health and youth from under her felt hat. Odile recognized all the advantages of the younger woman. She knew that she herself was not looking her best, that the journey combined with her fear had tired her, that the keen air had made her pale, and that her becoming veil could

not disguise her momentary inferiority. But she was not new to any game, and fortified herself with a reminder of her wit and charm, independent of looks. So she showed the most good-natured indifference to her surroundings, praised the façade of the château, the trees in the park, and complimented Diane on her blooming appearance. The presence of two men puzzled her, for Félix had spoken only of one, an American. Here were two foreigners, and as she sipped her tea, and told with her admirable humor the adventures of her journey, she studied them both out of her baby-blue eyes, trying to discover if a plan she had half-formed in her mind would have any chance of success. It would n't be a small triumph to tempt Diane's slave from her side, and thus place herself beyond all fear. So she talked in her pretty way, first of herself, and then with an adroit turn began to make the others talk of themselves.

"We are all breathless with excitement trying to solve a riddle, madame; you must help us," said Temple, as he took her tea-cup from her hands.

"Ah! I 'm good at guessing; tell me what it is."

"It is to find out why Monsieur Blake went to Paris yesterday. He ran off in the most mysterious way, had not more than twenty-four hours there, and came back by the night train because he says he promised Madame Ernst to be here today. Now, why did he go?"

"Madame Ernst can't tell?"

"No," said Diane. "That 's why we 're wondering."

"And monsieur won't tell?" she asked with a full glance at Grafton.

"That 's making me out rather savage to say I won't; but it 's my secret, so I naturally think I have a right to it. Don't you agree with me?"

Odile dropped the jesting tone that they had all used, and said with a serious ring in her voice: "You are quite right, monsieur; each of us has his or her '*jardin secret*,' as Marcel Prévost teaches us, and it should be respected, even by those nearest and dearest to us. Don't be afraid that I shall try to discover anything you want to keep hidden."

She rose as she spoke, and held out her hand with the sweetest possible smile. "I must say *au revoir*, for I am tired, and want to rest before dinner; but if I dream out your folded bud in your garden, I will not tell."

Diane rose, too, offering to show her guest to her room, and left the three men standing together.

They scarcely spoke as they went up the stairs, but the moment that the marquise found herself alone, she began to go over every word of the conversation. If it were the American artist who was supposed to be in love with Diane, why had he kept his secret from her? She evidently had no idea what it was, for she had shown her curiosity. No, he had seemed too indifferent to his pretty hostess; he was not in love with her. But the Englishman? That was another matter. Odile

was a connoisseur in the grades of feeling, and she recognized a well-known light in his eyes, an over-eager desire to anticipate Diane's wishes, an unmistakable atmosphere about him that told her his story. But she, Diane, had either learned much in the school of dissimulation, or did not care for him, for she had not betrayed herself in any way. If she were indifferent to him, then Odile's panic was absurd. On the other hand, Félix had been so confident; and he had impressed her with the truth of his observation. But he had said that it was the artist who cared for his wife! Well, there was nothing for it but to watch, and set all the traps possible during these three days of her visit. Then if the worst came to the worst, there was always an escape in a marriage with a foolish but wealthy youth, twelve years younger than she, who was wearing himself to skin and bones for her sake, having taken no visible nourishment for months, but that unsatisfying extract to be got by sucking the head of a knobby cane. He was her slave; at least she felt no such fear of him as she did of this Jew — ugh! How he had held her hand when he helped her from the carriage. It was revolting; it was stronger than she, this disgust she felt.

Then, finding her mind running back to this distracting point, she resolutely set herself to rest, and relaxing every muscle, and banishing by the power of her will every annoying thought, she rested for an hour, with the result that she appeared at dinner as fresh as a girl of sixteen.

It was her good moment then. Beside her graceful personality, which did not disdain to stoop to delicate flattery, Diane seemed brusque and unformed. She looked like the daintiest of Dresden china shepherdesses, too slight a thing to be more than charming, made for idyls in well-appointed gardens or boudoirs, artificial, heartless if you will, but bewitching. In spite of which, behind the blue eyes, and the delicate arched brows, there was a strong, material brain, strongest in that it recognized its limitations. She owned that Félix was to her a closed book, and bent her energies to finding out how to escape from him. They were only five at dinner, for Monsieur de Beaulieu was to be away the greater part of a week, and the talk was amusing, even brilliant, in a glittering fashion that is not rare in France when women are present. Diane made some of her crashing remarks, and Odile played delicately with dangerous subjects, watching the others with a masked intentness. What she saw puzzled her. The young Englishman wore his heart on his sleeve, that was sure, but Diane did not seem to be impressed by his devotion. On the other hand, there was a tone in her voice, a lowering of her black lashes, a persuasive nothing, that Odile's quick perception took under consideration, whenever she spoke to or looked at the American artist. And just there had been the hardest puzzle. It seemed to Odile that he was too indifferent in his manner not to be feigning.

It was unnatural for a man to remain so unmoved when a young and charming woman paid him the flattery of her attention. The marquise never underrated the attractions of other women; that was, perhaps, one of her strongest points.

After dinner they had gone into the long hall. A fire burned at each end, and a touch on his arm had suggested to Félix that he and the marquise would find the corner near the piano the most agreeable, while the others grouped themselves round the lower fireplace.

"I am starving for some music," said Odile over her shoulder as she left the trio, "and Monsieur Ernst is going to play and sing for me."

They were far enough away to be able to talk unheard, especially under cover of a few straying chords, and yet Odile had the protection of her hostess. Her fright grew in the presence of this man. Unconsciously to himself, he had allowed a hint of proprietorship to creep into his bearing with her, and although it was mingled with a fawning manner, almost pathetic in its doglike fidelity, it was there, and she felt it. Félix was the slave of his passion; to see her under his roof, to be so near her that his coat-sleeve brushed her arm, put him in a semi-delirious state. He was intoxicated with the rare glances she had bestowed on him, and now they were to a certain extent alone. He ran his fingers over the notes, caressing them as if they could feel, and tell her how they thrilled beneath his touch.

"Play something straight through, to begin with," she said in a low tone; "then, when they are used to the noise, we can talk."

He obeyed, and without hesitation played a Chopin waltz. The music ran through his brain with ecstatic folly; it took hold of his mind, and mastered it. His love for her was so clearly expressed, his sensuous joy in her beauty, his tumult of passion, even the minor whisper of tragedy, the hollow resonance of the tomb beneath the dancers' feet, all was so plain to him that he feared the others might interpret his meaning, and he looked at her to see if she felt it as he did. But the marquise was intently watching the three figures at the other end of the room. Félix came back from his ecstasy to more commonplace feelings, which had, however, their own rapture, for happiness seemed very near with her by his side.

"Which one does she care for?" asked Odile, playing with her fan.

"The American."

"Are you sure? It looks to me more like the other."

Félix pondered. His idea had been so fixed in Grafton's direction that Temple had moved through his contemplation of the others like a ghost, a transparency of no value. Odile's words caused him a moment's reflection, no more; then he replied: —

"I think not. The curé is of my opinion. He thinks it only a matter of time now before I am free — *free!*"

He repeated the word in a lower tone, but with infinite meaning. Odile did not meet his look. She leaned her head against the back of her chair, and fixed her eyes on the tip of her slipper.

"Ah, time, — that is of more consequence to me now than anything in the world," she said.

"Why?"

"I can't tell you now. I will before I go — if I dare; if I can."

"What do you mean? For the love of Heaven, don't frighten me so."

"Hush! You are talking too loud; play again."

He struck a few chords, watching her anxiously as he did so.

"Tell me your plan," she said, after a moment; "but cautiously. Be calm."

"If I can with you by me, but it 's hard."

"Forget me; speak plainly."

"My plan, then, is this: as you know, I have made myself solid at Rome, and it only remains to satisfy the law; to compass that I am informed by the curé that I have been wronged. I fight a duel to retrieve my honor; then I civilly divorce my wife, the religious ceremony having been declared null and void. It 's very simple."

"Simple? But if you should be hurt? Killed?"

"No fear of that."

"How can you be sure?"

She was watching him narrowly now, and saw a sly, cunning expression creep into his face.

"He neither shoots nor fences. That 's why I 'm sure."

"Félix, Félix, no wonder you succeed in all you undertake."

She smiled at him as she spoke, and in her heart despised him more than ever before. The faint admiration that she had felt when she heard that he was ready to risk his life for her was dashed out by the scorn she could have crushed him with for his acknowledged mean cowardice. Still she met his ardent gaze, and she returned it.

"Play some more for me," she said, nestling among the cushions. She wanted to think, to see her way if she could. And as Félix laid his soul bare in his music, she tried to define her situation. She felt surer than ever before that she had summoned a spirit by her magic which was on the eve of becoming her master. She could count no longer on her power over him. She was feeble compared with the force of the passion she had inspired him with. If his combinations worked, what a position she would be in! Her confidence in Diane's pride of race as a protection against any slip on her part was being shaken. Odile watched her at the far end of the hall. She was between the two men, all of them smoking, and it was evident that Temple was telling some story, for he was the continuous speaker, the others apparently interrupting now and then by asking some question. Odile noticed that whenever he looked at Blake, Diane took the opportunity to turn her head in the direction of the artist, and that when Temple again turned to her, she stared

at the ceiling, or the fire. Presently the tale came to an end, and Diane took up the cover of a cigarette-box lying on the table, and seemed to be explaining to Temple where to find more like it. She pointed upward, and made a motion with her hands as if opening a drawer. The young fellow nodded, rose, and lounged out of the room. As soon as he had gone Diane turned to Grafton, and began to talk with animation. She looked slightly angry, and the movements of her head betrayed impatience. Grafton threw off his indolent manner, leaned forward, and made some remark, evidently short and to the point, for Diane threw up her hands with an air of astonished exasperation, and said something which drew from her listener a hearty laugh, so loud that it rang through the room, over the crashing chords.

"Is he so sure of her that he dares make her impatient with him? It is certain they have a secret understanding," thought Odile, as Temple returned with a fresh box of cigarettes, and the others relapsed into their former manner of indolent indifference.

"Odile — Odile." Félix loved to hear her name drop from his lips, and lingered over the pleasure. "Odile, tell me what you meant just now by time being necessary to you. I can't wait. I must know."

"I can't now; I don't dare to."

"What are you afraid of?"

"You."

"Me! Good God! How can you say that to me? You still care for me? Answer! Repeat what you said when you first came! Quick!"

"Take care; they will hear — or see. Yes, yes, I say it again. I care for you as much as ever."

"Then how can you be afraid of me?"

"Can't you understand being afraid of hurting a person you loved?"

"And you are going to hurt me?"

Félix was white to his lips; his fingers moved heavily over the keys making discords.

"Perhaps. I can't tell yet. Don't force me to tell you to-night; you will betray us to the others. Take me to walk to-morrow morning, and then I shall know better what to say. All the complications are not on your side."

"Have you no pity? Do you realize what my night will be after your words?"

"And will mine be better? Don't you understand yet that you can't suffer without making me suffer, too? Have you no faith in me? *My* Félix?" She whispered the last words with a semblance of genuine feeling; they conquered the man for the time.

"Ah! You treble my sufferings when you say that, and yet you make them symbols of infinite joy. Was ever woman loved as I love you? Speech is too coarse to express to you my devotion. Only music can speak as I wish. Listen, and put my heart in the sounds you hear. I love you! I adore you!"

He began Wagner's *Preislied*, and put his very soul again into the chords. She saw his excitement, she even felt some thrill run through her, but she could not fathom his intensity. Diane and Temple were talking again, but Grafton had moved away, and was listening to the song. Thinking himself unnoticed he set no watch over his expression, and gradually fell under the sway of the music. Odile forgot her own agitation in watching him. She was struck by the intense sadness of his face. It told a new and unsuspected story. There was unmistakable distress in his eyes; he was unhappy. Was it possible that he was one of those mythical Americans who really respect women, and that he was breaking his heart for Diane? As she looked at him he leaned his head upon his hands, covering his eyes; the whole attitude betrayed deep feeling. She might be right; he might consider the baronne beyond his reach, and in that case she could breathe again. But even as this comforting thought came to her, Diane looked over her shoulder, and when she saw Grafton her whole aspect changed. Odile noticed the abrupt, troubled gesture with which she tossed her cigarette into the fire; the restless, undecided way in which she half rose from her chair, and then fell back again. No, she was not indifferent to the handsome foreigner, and it would only take a word on her part to open his eyes to his good fortune. She was so engrossed that she hardly noticed that the music had ceased, until Grafton rose,

and went to Diane, holding out his hand for good-night. The room was so large that the words spoken did not reach her ears, but she noted Diane's half petulant, half hurt look as she glanced at the clock, and the indifference of Grafton's smile as he turned to cross the room to bid her and his host good-night. Odile's hopes bounded up once more; he did not care, and in her relief she relaxed her lips into a smile.

Some chance made Diane look towards her guest at that moment; she saw and misinterpreted the smile. With an angry flush springing to her cheeks she darted a glance of assumed bravado and amusement towards the marquise, who failed to catch it, as she had dropped her lids, and was playing absent-mindedly with her fan, wondering how the others had interpreted the air of victorious joy with which Félix had accompanied Grafton to the door. When she ventured to look again in Diane's direction the younger woman had slightly altered the position of her chair so that she half faced the upper end of the room, and every one of her attitudes could be plainly seen. After Félix had returned, and had begun again to strike chords, then Diane started her game. Odile could see Temple's manner become more and more eager; he leaned forward until his face was close to Diane's, and she did not seem to discourage him; their eyes met often, and his eyes burned into hers. He smoked no longer, and when he moved his hands they were tremulous. What was the girl

saying to him? What did she mean? Odile lost herself in her wonder; she knew what it would mean with most women if they showed half the coy, more than willing show of surrender that Diane expressed by her quick, suddenly averted glances, her embarrassed laughs, her frequent returns to gravity; but with the baronne, was it that?

She must be alone to think; so whispering, "I am tired; I must say good-night now. To-morrow I will tell you all," she rose and went to the group by the fire. As she drew near Temple she saw that his eyes were glittering with liquid fire, and his manner was abrupt and agitated.

"I am going, too," he said, bending over Odile's hand.

"But you will dine here to-morrow? What shall I do alone, I, who do not like music, if you desert me?" said Diane.

"What about the curé?" asked Félix quickly.

"Monsieur Temple will tell him that we can dispense with his eagle beak for one Sunday in the year; you will, won't you?" she added with a long, slow sweep of her eyes up to Temple's.

The young fellow looked confused; he hesitated a little.

"I say, it 's a bit hard to make me tell him that, you know."

"You? A diplomat? Nonsense! Frighten him with a story of a beautiful woman, all Saint Anthony's temptations rolled into one form; tell him

that the baron is counting on ten thousand years off purgatory because he is able to resist her."

"I 'll try to be diplomatic; that 's my highest ambition," said Temple, breaking the effect of an awkward remark. He bowed himself out, followed by his host, and Odile picked up her fan and handkerchief.

"Good-night, my dear. Your hermitage is not as dull as I fancied it would be. Two slaves — amusing, but complicated at times, eh?"

"One must live in the country as well as in Paris."

"Yes; I suppose so. And your artist told you his secret after all?"

"To be sure; he can't keep much from me," replied Diane, with the bravado of a schoolgirl.

Odile escaped before Félix returned from seeing Temple off, laughing a "Naughty girl" over her shoulder as she left Diane. It was still early, and her maid had not yet come from the servants' hall, so as Odile was not sleepy she put on a loose peignoir, and sat down before the fire to think.

"I am in a trap," ran her thoughts. "I confess I don't understand Diane, but one thing is certain; if love does n't throw her into the American's arms, pique will into the Englishman's. Generally where a woman makes so much smoke there 's but little fire. But she is young, and thinks it smart to show off her lovers. It 's surely one or the other. In either case I am lost. Think of being the cause of a duel between *him* and a

foreigner! I, who have seen their masters at my feet! It would ruin my prestige; the truth would lurk out somehow, it always does, and I might have to marry him after his divorce to save my reputation. To think that after my life I should be cornered by a low Jew! It makes me wild! I wish I could run away. I believe I will."

She moved restlessly about the room, touching the articles on the tables. There was a volume of Alfred de Musset's poems, and as she fluttered the leaves the book opened at one marked with a ribbon attached to a little gold charm, and she remembered having spoken to Félix of this poem as one of her favorites. She gave an exclamation of impatience. How he pursued her! He drove her wild!

Going back to her chair by the fire, her mind reverted to the young fellow who had been her slave for months. He had begged her to marry him more than once, and she had refused in her own manner that made a refusal from her more flattering than an acceptance from most women. The little Comte de Brimont had seemed to her the incarnation of dullness, and she had only amused herself with him, because, as he was a "catch," it entertained her to see the dismay she was able to produce among the mammas who thought him suitable for their daughters. Now his meagre form suddenly attained majestic proportions in her imagination, and he loomed in her mind a very tower of strength.

"What if I take him after all?" she asked herself. "He is a gentleman, rich, and easily managed. I would rather be free, but for that money is necessary, and I have none worth speaking of. Ernst has made things easy for me this year, and very delicately, too; give the devil his due. But he has become unendurable; he worries me. Brimont will never do that any way. If the saints won't send you a horse, you must be grateful for a donkey."

The door was opened suddenly, and the maid entered.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, starting. "I didn't know that madame la marquise had come upstairs. I beg her pardon. I heard no bell."

"No, I didn't ring, Georgette, for I thought you might not have finished your dinner," said Odile pleasantly. She made a rule of cultivating the valuable affection of her servants, and this woman in particular adored her.

As Georgette busied herself about the luxuriously appointed room she talked to her mistress of the arrangements below stairs which had gained her strong approval.

"And every one thinks well of monsieur le baron. He sees to every little thing himself, for all he 's away so much. Madame la baronne has no more to do with the housekeeping than I have. She only gives orders to her own maid and her own coachman. It was the master who saw to the arrangement of madame la marquise's room himself.

They said he was here ten times at least to-day, seeing that the sheets were aired, and the perfumes put in the dressing-room. He watched the fire for an hour after it was lighted. There are not many ladies who take such pains."

Odile felt the angry color rush into her cheeks; the man was insufferable with his all-pervasiveness. She made an impatient gesture, and went into the dressing-room to conceal her vexation from her maid. This room was in a turret, and the curtains hung before the windows set in the curving walls, making little recesses. Odile leaned her head against the cool glass, her brain busy. The night outside was clear, the stars shedding a faint light, while a waning moon, *en déshabillé*, came up tardily above the southern horizon. At first she saw only the dark masses of the laurels, but as she grew more accustomed to the gloom, she noticed a red spark, not ten feet from her. She stared at it for a moment. Gradually she made out the gleam of a shirt-front, then a man's form came dimly into view. It was Félix, watching her window. She drew back, and returned to the fire, a nervous shiver running over her.

"Georgette, I have been obliged to change my plans. Make arrangements with the coachman to take us to Amboise for the half-past eight train to-morrow morning, and mind you tell no one else."

CHAPTER XV

But Odile had reckoned without her host. Félix, all on fire with the thought of her beneath his roof, and with her disturbing words ringing in his ears, had been unable to sleep, and when the first faint streak of light made the objects in his room visible, he rang for his valet. No answer coming, he reflected that the man was probably still asleep, and so dressed without his aid, and went down to the stables in the damp chill of the autumn morning. An hour's ride would do him good, and settle his nerves for the coming interview with Odile. He ordered his horse from a groom, who was sweeping out the stable-yard, and soon was trotting briskly along the road. The exercise calmed him, and he went further than he had intended, so that the sun was up, shining on all the faint blue spirals of smoke that ascended in the still air from the peasants' cottages, when he came back through the village.

As he trotted slowly round the curve, he saw the château omnibus going at a smart pace along the road to Amboise. He wondered a little who had ordered it out, then he thought that it might have been sent for his father-in-law, and the subject slipped out of his mind as he walked his horse

along the avenue, looking up at the windows behind which *she* was at this very moment. He noticed with some surprise that they were open, and the shutters thrown back, but it might be later than he imagined, he concluded, as he dismounted at the door.

"What has the omnibus gone for?" he asked the groom, summoned from the stable by an electric bell.

"Monsieur le baron, to take the lady who came yesterday to the Paris train."

"*What?*"

"Yes, monsieur le baron, the lady, and her maid, and the trunks. They left to get the 8.28 train."

Without one word Félix threw himself again on his horse, struck him sharply with his crop, and dashed down the avenue. What did it mean? Had Diane insulted her? She was capable of it. He must see her; he must stop her.

Odile in the mean time had settled herself comfortably in her railway carriage alone, her maid being in a second-class compartment. She felt safe for the first time, and as she heard the click of her door-handle when the guard shut her in, and the sundry cries and toy trumpets that are necessary to start a French train, she drew a long sigh of relief, and leaned back feeling that she had left her panic and its cause behind her forever.

She did not notice an extra bustle on the platform, or pay any attention to the jerk that might

have told her that the train had been held for some one. Therefore she was taken by complete surprise when the door of her compartment was flung open, and Félix, breathless, muddy, in riding dress, sprang in.

For a moment neither spoke. He was breathing rapidly, his nostrils dilating from the effort he had made during the last half hour, and the final, desperate rush for the train, which had so nearly escaped him. The woman facing him was dumb for the time being with surprise and fear. She had also a ghastly, hysterical inclination to laugh. It was all so absurd; her flight, his pursuit, making her precautions useless. This last reflection steadied her, and she was the first to speak.

"What on earth are you doing here?"

"I think that I am the one to ask you that. Tell me — what are you doing here?" He spoke with difficulty, in gasps, but his look was firm, even menacing. She was cornered, and the knowledge that escape was hopeless gave her new courage.

"Since you have followed me, and insist on an answer, I will give it to you; but believe me, Félix, I would have spared you this interview if I could."

"What have you to say to me? What did you hint last evening? I must and will know."

"It will make you suffer, Félix. It was because I am such a coward where you are concerned that I tried to run away from you. I am able to bear my own pain — but not yours, oh, not yours."

What an admirable actress she was, with her small hands clasped, her eyes lifted imploringly to his, her full pink lips quivering, as with uncontrollable emotion. So admirable that he did not for one second suspect that he saw anything but the real woman before him.

"Anything is better than this doubt; tell me, quick."

"Then remember that if my words sound harsh and selfish it is because I am putting it all as bluntly as I can, to spare us both. Félix, there is not the least hope that you will be free to marry me for a long, long time. I am a woman, and understand other women. It is as useless to wait for Diane to release you by any act of hers as to wait for her death."

"For you I would wait an eternity, Odile."

"But how about me?" she replied dryly. "Am I to sit counting my wrinkles indefinitely? You forget that there are complications in my life. I must think of old age, and provide against it. If I let my chances slip waiting for you, what is to become of me if anything happens to you?"

"For the love of Heaven, don't speak so coldly! Don't calculate! Come with me now, far away — somewhere — only you and I" —

She broke in on his rhapsody with a tinkling little laugh. "Oh, Félix, what value should I have in your eyes, after a month — yes, I'll give you a month — without my position in the world? Think of that, please, before suggesting a lone isle in tropic seas."

"I don't think you know how I love you," he said simply.

"I think I know better than you do. You love me selfishly; you resent my making provision for myself."

"There is some one else — some other man" — he burst out incoherently.

"There are generally one or two other men in my case."

"But, Odile, I can't believe that you are going to part like this. We will get out at Blois, and take the train back. Stay till to-morrow — you promised to."

"And what excuse could I make to Diane? How about my urgent business, taking me off at dawn? No, no; the cold water is at our feet. Let 's make the plunge now, have the worst over, and try to forget what life might be — with each other."

"Why do you think Diane so secure? I think things look on the edge of a crisis."

"Oh, those two young men are schoolboys; Diane is too young herself to be dazzled by either of them. If she were ten years older there might be some hope; but now there 's none. Besides" —

"Well? What else?"

"Never mind my besides. I meant nothing." This was true; she had spoken at random.

"Yes, you did; tell me what it was."

"If you insist," she said trusting to the inspiration of the moment, "a woman like Diane, almost

a girl, prefers as a rule a man of the world, one who has made his mark, who has power."

"Perhaps; I don't deny your proposition. But where is there such a man?"

"Blind Félix! Can't you see that your wife is beginning to care for you, and that just there is her safeguard, and our failure?"

The idea was so startlingly new that for a moment Ernst remained silent, letting it sink into his brain; then he broke into a coarse laugh.

"My darling, you may be very clever, but you have missed the point here. I have told you of her insults to me. You know our relations."

"Girls of twenty are not rocks; they change sometimes. Especially when thrown into constant contact with a man of your force and charm."

"But that can't change me."

"Oh no; you and I can never change." Her voice was soft and caressing, but for the first time he felt a vague suspicion steal over him.

"You have made one mistake, according to my ideas; therefore it is just possible that you may make another. Will you give me another month?"

"Oh, Félix, how can I? I have already given you all that is most valuable of my thoughts, my love — I am struggling to be prudent, and you ask for a month. No, it is too much."

"A week then, Odile. Keep yourself free for a week. It is not much for a tortured man to ask. If by next Sunday you have heard nothing definite from me, I release you, though it breaks my heart even to say the words."

She turned her head away, and stared out of the window; the man had power, and his gaze dominated her. The feeling of panic was gaining possession of her again. Oh, how she hated him! His presence suffocated her.

"See, Odile," he went on, "we are coming into Blois. Give me a promise to wait one week, it is such a short time, and I will leave you at the station and go back to Beaulieu. But I warn you that you are making me desperate. Don't answer until you have thought a moment, but speak before you have driven me to threats."

His last words added to her fear, and that, with the hope he held out of leaving her in a minute now, induced her to say, sorely against her will,—

"I promise you — a — week."

The train was slowing up. When she was alone she could collect her ideas and send him a letter, even a telegram. But her reluctant answer was seized by him as a glimpse of heaven. For the first time in his life he put his arms round her, and pressed his lips on hers. Then he opened the window, leaned out and unfastened the door, and while the train was yet in motion, leaped to the platform and disappeared.

"Ugh!" shuddered Odile. "Animal!"

That same day in the afternoon Félix entered the curé's study. He was still in riding-dress, having just come from the station, and had sent his nag to the château stables by a village boy. There was not a moment to be lost, he had told himself

over and over, as he waited for the train to take him back, sitting restlessly on the green velvet sofa in the waiting-room at Blois. Although he was giddy for want of food, he could not eat the breakfast he ordered in the buffet, and had returned to stare at the impossible pictures on the walls, setting forth the attractions of the places attainable by the Orleans Railroad. To which one of them would he go with Odile? Pau? No; that was too full of the world; the gay groups looking at fox-hunts across mountain peaks were not for them. Arcachon, with small cottages under spreading trees? That would be better. But Biarritz, with the deep blue waves beating on the rocks, — ah, that was it! The sea, a yacht, an immensity of water, and only Odile, only the one woman in the world! Good God, he must be going mad, — the mere thought set his heart beating with such violence, and made his hands tremble visibly. No; she did not know how he loved her. She thought that her position had something to do with her attraction for him. But that was all gone. He was so completely the slave of his master passion that he had forgotten his old ambitions; his only aspiration now was to call her his own.

One week only; one little week! Would the train never come? He must set the ball rolling; he must hurry.

How he reached Beaulieu he never knew; all seemed mist-like to him until he found himself in the presbytery study.

The curé was not in the best of humors. In the first place it was Sunday, always a particularly trying day to him, with its two services, and the natural irritation caused by seeing the handful of indifferent faces before him; the faces of imbeciles, he called them, too dull to suspect the hidden eloquence that he was storing up. In the second place, he had caught his sister's cold, and felt himself aggrieved thereat, as a peculiar blow dealt to him alone, although when she was ill he had called it a mere nothing. In the third place, Madame Richer had never appeared since the day when she had left him with his treasure almost within his grasp. He had not been well enough to stroll through the village so as to see her as if by chance, and this morning she had not been at church. In the fourth place, Temple had utterly failed in his attempt to convey Diane's unflattering message in a diplomatic manner. He had had some thoughts of not delivering it at all, but the temptation of being practically alone with the baronne had been too strong, and he had blundered sadly. The curé had caught savagely at the implied insult, had controlled himself with difficulty, and had added another black mark to the mental score he kept against Diane's name.

He was cowering over an insufficient fire when the door was opened without ceremony, and Ernst walked in.

"One word," he began as abruptly as he had entered. "You remember our arrangement regarding the repairs on the church?"

"I do," replied the curé, as curtly as the other.

"A week from to-day ends the bargain. If you have nothing definite to tell me by that time, we shall be just as we were before the subject was mentioned. That 's all."

The baron was gone before the meaning of his words had quite reached the priest's brains.

"A week from to-day? Something definite?" he repeated in a dazed way.

Then it became quite clear. All his hopes, his dreams, must be focused to one point; he could not let them wander vaguely any longer; the moment had come for action, and it must be decisive.

The sacristan had begun to ring the bells for the afternoon service. There was no time just at the moment to do anything but sip some of the tisane provided for him by his sister, pull his knitted wristers well over his hands, and try to get through the service without any mistakes.

He looked quickly over the handful of women who composed the congregation, but Madame Richer was not there. He would send for her the instant he was free. The Latin sentences rolled out unmeaningly, and the women, pondering on the subject of the weather, and hoping that the wind would not change, so that to-morrow might prove a good day for the great autumn wash, noticed no mistakes in the rendering of the service. At best it was very short, and in less than half an hour the congregation was gathered together in the porch, commenting on the curé's cold and

hoarse voice, the probability of frosts, and the hopes for sun on the morrow. As they lingered the old priest stepped out among them.

"Good-day, mesdames," he said, with that low bow of his that always made his people feel there was a hidden mockery somewhere. "Madame Richer is not here to-day. She is not ill?"

"Monsieur le curé, I think not," replied the blacksmith's wife, a buxom, well-favored woman, with pink cheeks and blue eyes. "I saw her this morning at her door, laughing and talking with the mayor."

Two more blows for the priest; the most prominent person in his parish to slight his services, and to be seen in friendly converse with the mayor, a professed "indifferent," if not an atheist.

"Will one of you have the kindness to ask her to step into the presbytery for a moment, if you should be passing the Crescent?" he asked blandly. "Mademoiselle has a wish to speak to her."

The message was given, and in less than half an hour Berthe Richer stood for the first time before her curé without the sensation of fear tugging at her heart. She was free at last. He had watched her as she came in at the garden gate, and something in her swaying step, in the toss of her head, which made her gold earrings swing from side to side, warned him that he had lost his hold over her; it was intangible, but unmistakable.

"Where have you been since Thursday night?" he began sternly.

"Monsieur le curé, I have been as far as Amboise, I have been twice to the river, I have been once" —

"Why not here, to see me, to redeem your promise?" he interrupted, as she stood checking off her varied excursions on her fingers.

The defiant look in her face became more marked.

"I had nothing to tell," she said.

"Then hear this; listen, woman, for the future of your son depends on it."

"Go on, monsieur le curé," she replied airily, as a cough interrupted him, examining the fringe of the faded tablecloth while she spoke.

"You *must* have something to tell me — and that before the end of the week. You understand?"

"Oh yes, I am not stupid; I see what you mean. But it can't — and what 's more, it won't be done. There is, and there will be, nothing to tell."

"Woman," said the curé, summoning to his aid the same voice, a little exaggerated by hoarseness, that he employed to thunder from his pulpit of the terrors of hell, "as you value your soul, you will obey your priest, and not defy him."

"Monsieur le curé, for once I 'll speak to your face, as many a one speaks behind your back. I know little about my soul. I know much about my body. I will not make my body suffer for the good of something that I may never see. I can see and feel my vines and my cows; I can taste

my wine and my milk; but I 've only your word to go on about up yonder," — she swept her arm upwards as she spoke, with a fine, bold sweep, telling of the use of rake and scythe, — "and your word seems lighter than it used, before you put me into spy's work."

"Woman, you blaspheme," thundered the curé, feeling powerless before her bold, dark glance.

"It will all be the same a thousand years hence," she replied, with a shrug. "Now, to let my business alone, and to attend to yours, I tell you frankly that I will spy on Monsieur Blake no more; first, it is useless; there is no harm there. Second, if there were, I would not tell, for he is my friend. And once my friend, always my friend."

"And your son?"

"Thanks to him, my son is safe." Her voice broke abruptly here, and for the first time she showed signs of feeling. They passed away, however, like the shadow of a cloud, and she resumed in her usual voice: "You may hurt me as much as you like, but what do I care? I need not stay here another week any way, if I did n't want to. I could start to-morrow, and go to his new home, where he is to have much cattle, many acres, a nice little house for me to keep until he marries a rich girl, and everything he wants."

"What do you mean? Where has that good-for-nothing son of yours gone?"

"To the country of Monsieur Blake, where all

are the same, and every one is rich. The minute I am tired of life here, I can join him."

She spoke with so much confidence, that the curé more than half believed her. He darted a fierce glance at her, but she met it with bravado, even a twinkle of amusement showing in her eyes. Then he turned abruptly away, and began to arrange some papers on the table.

"Is that all, monsieur le curé?"

"Yes."

"Good-day, then; and if there *is* anything going on at the château, it might be that monsieur le curé could find out something under his own roof, and let mine alone."

She made him a mocking curtsy, and balanced out of the room, as indifferently as she had swung in.

Left alone, the curé sat quite still for a moment, whispering to himself, "Calm — calm; don't lose your self-control. Think. Be calm."

He pressed his hands against his head, as if to send away the surging blood from his temples, and after a short time he began to form thoughts. The first one was that Grafton had had some strong reason for bribing the woman to let him alone. She had evidently discovered something, and the price for her silence had been the immediate benefit bestowed on the rascally René. But if the discovery had nothing to do with Diane, what then? Madame Richer had plainly thrown suspicion on Temple. Could it be possible that Félix had

given the wrong clue? His mind, once turned in Temple's direction, eagerly seized hold of a hundred details, unnoticed before. He recalled the young fellow's air of intense, suppressed excitement when he had opened the door for him the night before, and how long he had heard his footsteps moving up and down his room in the quiet house.

The old man rose, and went slowly up the stairs to Temple's door, at which he knocked. There was no answer. Then he spoke: "Are you there, my friend? I want the dictionary." Still not a word. The curé turned the handle, and entered. The room was empty. He threw one of his quick, searching glances about him. The book mentioned lay open on the table, but he left it alone. He ran his eye over the dressing-table strewn with a variety of brushes and boxes; he then let it rest on the writing-table, among the untidy mass of papers and books. He saw nothing to interest him, and taking up the dictionary started for the door, when suddenly he halted. The object that fixed his attention was a straw hat hanging against the wall; in the ribbon of Oxford blue was stuck a magpie's black and white feather. Some association caused the curé's face to assume an expression of satisfaction. As he went back to his study he repeated to himself: "The soul of Diane de Poitiers — thieving creatures — Straws show which way the wind blows, and even a feather may lead a man in the right direction."

When he had closed his door against intruders

a wicked light shone on his face. He had been blind, but now he saw.

All feelings are so complex that the motives governing the bitter old man were composed as much of desire to be revenged on Diane for her insolence to him as the more laudable wish to elevate the church by elevating himself. It was with an intense craving to be revenged on her that he began his week's work, the most important of his whole life.

He laid his plans with shrewdness and caution; success was too near now to be trifled with. He must be prompt and sure.

In spite, however, of his resolution to keep a strong hold over himself, there were times when his mind slipped away from the present details to the glorious end which would crown his work. His imagination, for so many years his one refuge, would carry him in fancy to the scenes of his future triumphs. He had an instinct that he must keep close to the château, and he haunted the park and the woods near the house like a restless ghost. In and out among the trunks of the old trees would he flit, his black soutane fluttering about him, his breviary in his hand, his mind occupied, now with the present, now with the future.

At times the overarching branches seemed to him to form the fretted vault of some vast cathedral, and once, so vivid was the illusion, he broke out into an impassioned appeal, spreading his arms, and calling aloud. Surely he was at last in Notre

Dame! Those dusky figures were his congregation, those singing birds his choir boys! Then, with a start he realized that it was a vision; the sound of his own voice brought him back, and it was through the old, familiar paths that he trod — a spy. That was what the landlady had called the work — a spy's. The word rankled. The trouble with it was that it fitted.

If an angel had stood before the priest, and asked him to describe truly the motives pushing him, he would have answered without hesitation: "The good of the church." And perhaps even an angel would have failed to persuade him that the real motives underlying his actions were personal ambition, overwhelming pride, a craving lust for adulation, and a bitter hatred for Diane.

For two days he hardly came home. He could not tear himself from the château grounds. Many a servant caught sight of his robe gliding in and out among the trees, but they respected him, and saw nothing strange in his walks in the park. If he met any of them face to face, he had always a pleasant word, a kindly question, so that a footman, hurrying along early on the Wednesday morning, as fast as his white apron, which would get between his legs, allowed, showed no surprise at coming across the priest, pacing slowly with eyes bent on his book of hours.

The man bowed with a respectful, "Good-morning, monsieur le curé," and the reader raised his keen eyes with a little start.

"Ah, Jean, where are you going so swiftly, my lad?" he asked.

"To the pavilion, monsieur le curé. Madame la baronne has ordered her tea brought there this afternoon when she comes back from shooting. So I am on my way to light the fire, and put it to rights."

"There is a large party shooting to-day?"

"Pardon, monsieur le curé; only madame la baronne. She has gone out with the head gamekeeper, and has ordered tea for herself only."

"And monsieur le baron?"

"Is in his library, monsieur le curé."

"It is well. I will pay him a little visit. Be diligent, my son, and your works will prosper."

With a benevolent gesture the old man dismissed the servant, and turned away.

CHAPTER XVI

THAT same Wednesday morning had dawned clear and very cold. Temple was walking up and down under the leafless trees in the presbytery garden, finding it warmer outside than in, while he studied his fable to repeat to his master at the afternoon lesson. He had pulled the collar of his rowing jersey well up about his ears, and had a small tweed cap far down over his frowning brows. His short pipe was between his teeth, and he kept one hand in his knickerbockers pocket for warmth, while the other held open his volume of La Fontaine. His eyes were on the page, but his thoughts were wandering far afield.

"'Le pot de fer proposa au pot de terre un voyage.' Um-m-m, the iron pot proposed to the earthern pot a voyage — What the devil did she say she would n't go shooting with me to-day for? I wonder where Blake is. 'Le pot de terre' — She was decidedly cross last night; I don't understand her game. 'Le pot de fer proposa' — but she was awfully *jolly* as I came away. Where was I again? Oh, 'Le pot de fer'" — and just at that moment something fell at Temple's feet.

It was a long black and white feather, and attached to it was a sheet of note paper, twisted round a pebble to give it weight. He picked it up

doubtfully; there was no address. He held it for a moment staring at it. The idea that it might not be intended for his eyes made him hesitate. Then he reflected that it must be for him — there was no one else there. At this thought he made a sudden bound to the garden wall, and looked over into the road, but there was not a soul in sight. Then he untwisted the paper, which he recognized as the kind generally used by the baronne, pale gray, with a tiny silver crest, and read these words, printed in pencil, as a child might have done: "The pavilion, this afternoon, at four."

There was neither date nor signature, but his heart bounded, for he felt sure that the message was for him, and that it came from Diane.

At last! He was triumphant, and yet a little disappointment mingled with his exultation. He wanted to believe that this woman, whom he thought he loved, was perfect, although he had spent months in striving to make her lack perfection. While she repulsed him he had valued her more than now, even in the first glow of success, — for her note implied her complete surrender, — when he felt a hint of scorn creep into his mind. He thought of Grafton with a smile of superiority. "Blake 's all out about French women," he said to himself. Then the memory of his home and his mother came to him. It was gone as soon as realized, for he pushed it away. "I must be a man of the world. I must see life before I can succeed in my profession."

But that memory rankled. No man, brought up by a pure, true mother, with the hearty, healthy interests that Temple's typical English home had given him, can take a step like this without a struggle. It sometimes seems as if the struggle to do the first wrong were harder than the struggle to keep clean and straight.

He could settle to nothing, and strolled over to the inn, to see Grafton, and distract his mind. But Grafton, absorbed in packing up his summer sketches, was absent-minded, and far from amusing. So Temple soon left him, and returned to the adventures of the iron and earthen pots.

It was a long day, too, for Grafton, coming after a long, dull week. And something more than that; it had been a week of mental conflict and distress. His love for Suzette was strong and passionate, but it shocked against a trait of natural obstinacy as well as against his deepest convictions. He loved her; yes, that was true, but he hated the imagery of her religion, and during her absence he confused her personality with her faith. All that was true, and noble, and tender in Suzette became mingled to him with what he considered false, and low, and cruel. The question haunted him: "How could she be happy if she cared for me as I do for her, if such a thing is possible, and yet believe what she is taught, that I am doomed to everlasting torture? And if she does not believe in my perdition, then she is not loyal in her faith."

There came terribly dark hours, when he doubted his own convictions; we *know* so little; we sail under sealed orders. Was it worth his while to risk positive happiness here for a mere shadow? What did it all come to in the end? Then he asked himself if, supposing he had the power, would he persuade Suzette to give up her beliefs for his? Would a woman's nature find enough to hold on to, in hours of trouble, in his high, refined philosophy? Would not the comfort that sustained him, the feeling of being one of a mighty orchestra, whose only duty is to keep his instrument in perfect tune, not that he may hear his own music, or that the personal words, "Well done," might ever be addressed to him, but that the universal harmony might receive no discord from his want of attention, prove cold and unsatisfactory to her? How was it proving to him, in the hour of his trial? Was it faith in something without or within himself that made him immovable and yet brought no comfort?

After Temple had left him, and he had finished his work, he fell to brooding over the fire, in spite of Paddy's hints and wistful looks towards the door. Monsieur and Madame Vernon had been in Paris since Suzette left home, an unwonted gayety for them, but one which the good wife saw that her husband needed, for he had been depressed of late. So with a sigh she relinquished the quince preserves to the care of her cook, and set off in search of distraction. Consequently Grafton had

heard nothing of Suzette, and although her parents were expected home that afternoon, and *she* would follow them on the morrow, he felt that he must wait at least forty-eight hours more before trying to see her — that is, if he could.

The afternoon dragged along until Paddy came to the conclusion that he could bear no more; so he first clawed at his master's leg, after the manner of petted dogs, and then, when he had attracted attention, wheeled round and round in his usual mad whirl, uttering short, sharp barks. Grafton softened at the sight.

"I am a selfish beggar, Paddy, and you shall have your walk," he said, rising, and taking his hat and stick. He stood at the inn door for a moment, uncertain as to what direction he should take. He did not care to go up the lane by the Vernon house; he wanted to wait now until he could see Suzette face to face. The light was cut off from the road by the line of gently rising hills, but he saw the rays of the sun, sinking towards the southwest, touching the uplands with gold; so he decided to strike through the Beaulieu park, and see the sunset from the little pavilion that commanded a wide-stretching view of the valley of the Loire.

He took the winding path beneath the solemn oaks, and walked briskly until he reached the summit. There on a plateau stood the small building, and far beneath him lay the green meadows, still spring-like with their thick sward spangled with

the violet flowers of the saffron, the crocus of autumn. The river reflected the rich glory of the west, and the air was so still that the voices of the peasants rose clearly to his ear, mingled with the sound of beating that came from the primitive wash-tub of some village housewife, who was standing barefooted in the stream, wringing out her clothes, and then beating them, like refractory children, with a small wooden paddle. Far away in the direction of Tours a puff of white smoke marked the approach of a train, and as Grafton gazed the little line of wagons glided along beneath him like a mechanical toy serpent. The sound of hoofs rang up through the trees, and a two-wheeled cart rollicked along the hard road, bearing a thrifty couple home from market.

Grafton was soothed by the mixture of repose and stir, and was about to resume his walk, when Paddy, who had been snuffing about the doorstep of the pavilion, began to scratch fiercely at the stone, as if wanting to get in.

"There 's no one there, you rascal; come on," said Grafton. But the dog, with an undecided look at him, returned to his task. Grafton, being in no hurry, and in that listless state brought on by brooding long and sadly on one subject, took hold of the door-handle, to show his little four-legged friend that he might leave with a free conscience. To his surprise the door opened at his touch, and he found himself staring at Diane and Temple.

There is always a subtle atmosphere about persons undergoing agitation, whether they show outward signs of it or not, and the intruder found himself involved at once in a situation of some sort, but of what nature he could not at first guess.

Diane was standing leaning against the chimney-piece, very white, and her lips so tightly closed that they seemed one thin line across her face. Temple was sitting on the sofa, staring at her with a blinking expression in his eyes, as if he had received a blow. There were surprise, indignation, mortification, expressed in his changing looks.

For a short moment all three remained without speaking or moving; then Diane stepped swiftly to Grafton's side, and, laying one hand on his arm, looked full at Temple, while with the other she pointed to the open door. The gesture was a haughty command. Temple rose, and stood facing her.

"May I say one word?" he asked.

"No."

There was almost no sound, for Diane's throat felt closed and dry; and her chin trembled when she parted her lips, but she still pointed to the door, and Temple, obeying her gesture, went out, closing it behind him. As she heard the sound of his steps die away, she let her raised arm fall, and with a sob that seemed to shake her to pieces flung herself down on the sofa, and burst into violent hysterical cries. Grafton, although new to this sort of emotion, stood quietly by until he could

make himself heard; then he sat down beside her, and spoke gently, telling her to be calm, to rely on him, and not to send him away until she was quite herself.

"Oh, no! Oh, no! Stay with me! Keep me by you! I am so frightened, so unhappy. But you won't ask me why, will you?"

"No; unless I could help you."

"No, no one can help me. Oh, I am so frightened," she began again, and coming closer to Grafton cowered beside him for protection. There was no time for him to wonder what had caused the trouble. When a woman, showing signs of relapsing into violent hysterics, is clinging to you, the present instant is the only matter for consideration, so he put his arm about her in a protecting way, and sat without speaking, waiting for the sobs to cease entirely. Nothing appeals so powerfully to a strong nature as a call from weakness; and Diane seemed very weak and childish at the moment, in her short shooting-skirt, her pretty blonde hair disheveled, and falling round her face, and her eyes swollen and red from crying. But there was no feeling in his heart save pity, and perhaps a touch of impatience at the length of the attack.

But for her it was another matter. How often had she dreamed of his arm being about her as it was now. Such a strong, firm arm, so protecting in its pressure, which became closer with every sob, relaxing somewhat as they died away. This

was not lost on Diane, and she sobbed on for the pleasure of feeling that tight clasp. The rough cloth of his coat sleeve, the faint odor of smoke in its folds, the masculine atmosphere surrounding him intoxicated her, and she was in no haste to put an end to a position of such charm. Besides, she believed that now she had made sure of him; what man could fail to be moved by her complete surrender? What creature with blood, not water, in his veins, could help being stirred by having her so completely in his power? A fig now for any other woman! All that had been needed was a chance to show him how willingly she would listen to words of love from him, and fate had given her this chance. Without doubt, had there been no Suzette in the case Grafton would have been moved by the situation, for he had blood in his veins, and no mistake; but as matters were, no woman in the world could have stirred him, excepting the one whom he loved solely and singly. Had he been free to respond to Diane's passion, his influence for good over her would have lost the slight power it now possessed, while hers for bad over him would have grown stronger hourly.

So they remained, close beside one another in the body, their spirits separated by temperament, character, and race.

Paddy, who had already expressed his sympathy for Diane by jumping up and kissing her tears away, felt that he had played his part, and done all that was required of him; so with a serene

philosophy he betook himself to the hearth rug, there to await further developments.

Everything seemed very quiet after the storm of sobs; the flicker of the fire was the only sound. Diane had remained passive for several minutes, and Grafton was beginning to withdraw his arm, when the door was opened softly, and on the threshold stood Baron Ernst.

He gave a theatrical start of surprise, and then strode to Diane, who had not noticed his entrance; no sound had reached her, and her eyes were buried against Grafton's shoulder. Félix laid his hand on her wrist firmly, but without roughness.

"At last, madame; it is enough. Go away now," he said.

She stared bewildered into his face; then, as she saw there no anger, she rose, staggering a little, and pulled her arm away from his grasp.

"I have been ill; Monsieur Blake has been very good to me; he was going to help me home when I felt well enough. I can go now."

"Yes; that is best. Monsieur le curé is without; he will help you."

"I am all right now. Let us all go together," she said, her voice growing stronger.

"I want to ask Monsieur Blake about an engagement we have; you go on. I will follow soon."

Diane still seemed shaken, for she made no show of resistance to her husband's command; she took a step towards the door, saying to Grafton: —

"You will dine with us to-night? I want to thank you again. You are always helping me."

Grafton bowed. "I cannot promise for to-night," he said.

"Please," she replied, as she went from the little room under the shadow of the trees without.

The baron shut the door behind her, and then wheeled round, and stood facing Grafton. He folded his arms, and scowled somewhat dramatically, but there was a triumphant gleam in his cunning eyes.

"Monsieur Ernst," Grafton began at once, "I realize, what madame your wife seemed to ignore, that you must have an explanation from me of the position in which you found us. I can only repeat the truth, as she told you; she was ill, and had a bad attack of nerves, in which I was of some use."

"Of course," said Ernst, "I quite understand. My friends will find yours to-morrow? or when?"

"If you understand, I confess I don't," retorted Grafton, stung by a sneer on the baron's face. "I have made a simple statement — what have your friends or mine either to do with it?"

"Yes, the statement *was* simple, but the position in which I found you and the Baronne Ernst was not equally simple. It requires something more complicated to explain that."

"I am accustomed to have my word believed."

"I am sure of that, monsieur — and I am accustomed to believe the evidence of my senses."

Again the sneer was so marked that Grafton's

blood boiled, and he restrained himself with difficulty. He must be cool in order to consider what was the safest course to take in order to shield Diane without involving Temple.

"Monsieur," he began earnestly, "it is for your own interest to believe my statement; think how your wife's reputation will suffer if we meet. I assure you on my honor that I was only doing my best to calm her in a severe attack of hysterics" —

"Occasioned by what?"

"She did not tell me; I came here quite by accident, and found her in the state already mentioned."

"You are saying all that a gentleman could say; in reply I repeat my question as to where your friends may be found."

"Then you don't believe me?"

Ernst looked him squarely in the face with an expression of subdued amusement.

"Do you wish a categorical answer? A truthful one might — annoy you."

"Take care!" cried Grafton, with a dangerous lift of his right shoulder.

The baron shrank slightly, and said in some haste, —

"Am I to understand that you are afraid to meet me fairly? If so" —

"Afraid! *No!* Whenever you wish!" cried Grafton, now in a towering rage; "although I ought to break this stick over your body instead of giving you a satisfaction you don't deserve."

"Our seconds will settle all details," said the baron civilly.

There was not a hint of irritation in his voice, notwithstanding Grafton's fairly frank remarks. It was all right! He was winning, had almost won his fight; Odile was the prize, and she was close to him now. He could afford to smile at insult and abuse.

So he bowed politely to the retreating back of his adversary, who had clapped his hat on his head, and stridden out, Paddy close at his heels, too hurriedly to catch the last words.

Grafton was in such a blind passion that at first he thought only of the Jew's insolence, and his wish to pound the beast to a jelly. But as he made his way down the hill the breadth and depth of the situation came to him. He had been forced into a false and ridiculous position. Loving one woman with all his heart and soul, he was about to fight the husband of another, for whom he felt a bare friendship — an interest, perhaps, but not any real liking. It was not impossible that he might lose his life in the affair. It is the fashion to laugh and jeer at French duels, but Grafton had lived long enough in France to know that there is danger in them; they are not all the theatrical advertisements of journalists.

No man who has looked as deeply into life as he had can risk his share of it lightly. No man who loves as truly and passionately as he can face with cheerfulness giving up that love. He had always

vowed that he would have the courage to refuse a duel, if ever pressed upon him; but he had reckoned without the blind, mad anger that rushed over him when the Jew had insulted him. The unworthiness, too, of the cause disgusted him. Had he been Diane's lover, he would have been ready enough to fight for her; but he was not, nor had he wished to be.

And Suzette! Even if he were not killed, how would she feel about him? It was an insult to the love that he was burning to declare to her. His heart seemed to break at the thought.

He walked on mechanically, his head down, conscious only of the sharp stabs that kept coming and going in his breast, which seemed more physical than mental. He stumbled into the inn, up the winding stairs, and dropped into a chair, his hat still over his eyes, his hand still grasping his stick. Paddy's cold nose against his clenched hand brought him back to the realization of all that lay before him to do.

"Poor little dog! She shall have you, if — if — She will love you, Paddy. Now, let me be a man. What is to be done?"

He took two or three turns up and down the room, and the regular movement had its effect. He knew that he must send for a "friend" — but who was there? Monsieur Vernon was out of the question. It would never do to drag Suzette's father into an affair of this sort. Temple? No; he shrank from even letting the boy know how

serious were the consequences of his folly. It would be ungenerous. He could telegraph to Paris, now filling up with many of his acquaintances, beginning their winter's work. That meant delay, but he could explain it.

He was still considering how to word his message, when the door opened and Temple walked in. He started a little when he saw Grafton's figure in the dim room, only lighted by some glowing embers.

"They told me you were out, old man. I 've come to explain things a bit to you. I 'm awfully cut up by what 's happened, but I want you to know that I was regularly cheated. Light up, will you, and look at this paper."

Grafton struck a match, and lighted a lamp standing on the table. In spite of Temple's preoccupation, he was struck by the haggard lines on his host's face, making it look gray and old.

"Hullo! What is it? Are you ill?" he sang out, in his boyish way.

"A little, perhaps; I am not quite up to the mark," said Grafton, in a tone without life.

"Well, then, I won't bother you long. But I like you, Blake, and I don't want you to think me worse than I am. It 's bad enough any way. I can't bear to think of my mother."

He was very young. His mother in her quiet home prayed nightly that her boy might not be led into temptation. His voice broke, and he drew the back of his hand across his eyes. Grafton

liked him better for the display of genuine feeling than ever before.

"I 'm glad you feel it that way; it 's not a bad thing to have the first experience sharp — without bad consequences."

Temple looked up, a little sheepishly, feeling that he had not played the rôle of a *blasé* diplomatist with success; and as his eyes rested again on Grafton's face, he was struck anew with the gray pallor and look of tension.

"Look here, Blake, you 're ill, or something. What is it? Bad news from home?"

"No; I 'm not myself; that 's all."

"Well, I won't keep you more than a jiffy, but I want you to see that I had some excuse for thinking that I was not going to make a confounded ass of myself. Look here."

He handed the crumpled bit of paper to Grafton as he spoke, and watched his expression as he read it.

"What do you make of it?" he asked at last.

"I think it 's some sort of a plot. Madame Ernst did not send it, you are sure?"

"Sure — damned sure," returned Temple grimly.

"Why was she at the pavilion just at that time?"

"Because she had ordered the butler to send her tea there at four, and to have a fire lighted, when she went out shooting early. She often does it, she told me once, when she and the baron are alone, to avoid being in the château with him."

"It may have been the work of some servant.

Any way, I don't wonder you believed it, and I 'm glad you had so good an excuse, Temple."

Again the drop in his voice struck Temple, who turned from his own affairs to say, —

"You've something bothering you, I 'm afraid?"

"Perhaps."

Temple fidgeted with his cap, which he held in his hand, shifted from one foot to the other, and at last said, —

"Look here, Blake; I want you to understand that if you care for — for her, Diane — I 'm quite out of the race — never was in it, I fancy," he ended, with a touch of bitterness.

Grafton came close to him, laying his hands on his shoulders.

"Thank you for telling me; I see and appreciate what you mean. But you 're all wrong. I love Mademoiselle Vernon, and if I live, hope to marry her."

The sadness in his voice, and the look in his eyes, invited no answer. Temple could only shake his hand violently, and say nothing. He turned as if to go, then wheeled round, and said abruptly: —

" I see that something is bothering you, and that you 'd rather not talk about it; but I 'd like awfully to help you if I could."

Grafton sorely wanted help, but he felt that it would be a cowardice to let the boy know that his act of folly had involved others in an affair of life or death; so he said with an effort (which failed deplorably) to make his voice cheerful and natural:

"No, thanks; you can do nothing. I may be off to-morrow, and if we don't meet again I 'd like to have you know that I have the best of feelings towards you, and wish you 'd try to believe what I 've stuck to in our discussions — that there are a good many decent French women."

The older man smiled as he said this, and held out his hand for Temple's, which he held tightly for a moment, and then dropped it, as the other said with reviving spirits, —

"Good-night, old boy, and don't think you 're going to shake me off like that. You 'll not go without saying good-by to me again."

"Good-by," said Grafton; "I 'd ask you to stay, but I have a great deal to write to-night."

Alone again, he composed a message to be sent by telegraph that would bring two of his friends from Paris by the next afternoon, and gave it himself to Madame Richer, bidding her send it without delay. Then he took up his pen to write a last letter to his mother, and, that finished, it remained still to leave a record of the truth for Suzette. The scream from the engine of the midnight train and the crowing of the barnyard cocks disturbed the dead quiet of his room, and still he wrote.

In the awful gravity of that hour Grafton's eyes saw more clearly than before. He made no attempt to cheat himself into a false hopefulness; he knew that the baron was a master of the sword and of firearms, and that he himself was unskilled

with both. He knew that he had bitterly offended his adversary. And from this point of view his positive opinions of yesterday took on a different aspect. More sure than ever of Eternal Good, he was less certain of his own interpretation of it. How had he, in his ignorance, dared to find fault with Suzette's faith? A humility fell upon him, in which there was nothing abject.

When Madame Richer had taken Grafton's orders with the telegram, she, too, had been struck by his looks. As she had told the curé, "once her friend always her friend," and she had a warm, womanly liking for the man who had helped her poor outcast son. Her quick brains set themselves to work; something was wrong, and she would be glad to right it. It would do her good to show her gratitude. She wondered if Temple knew of Monsieur Blake's trouble. She wanted to consult him, but what could she say? At last she worked out a way. With the message in her hand she went immediately to the presbytery, telling Denis to delay his harnessing until her return. Beaulieu boasts no telegraph station, so Grafton's dispatch was to be sent in haste to Amboise, for fear that the office would be closed.

The landlady had decided to risk being late, but she hurried nevertheless, and in a few minutes was waiting for Temple in mademoiselle's little salon, doubtful if she were about to do good or ill.

The curé's family was dining, and Temple came

from the dining-room with his napkin in his hand, as a gentle hint that his master did not like interruptions.

"You wanted me, madame?" he asked, with his funny accent and cordial smile.

"Pardon, monsieur, yes. It is to ask you to translate for me a message I am to send; it is in English, and I have forgotten what Monsieur Blake told me it was, so as to explain to Denis. Monsieur must not be disturbed, he said, so I took the liberty of coming here."

Temple, thinking the woman rather a fool, but good-natured notwithstanding, took the paper, and read the message, which was in English. Grafton had purposely written it so, in order that the contents might be kept secret. In a moment Temple's expression of amiable indifference had been banished by a frown, and a startled exclamation burst from his lips. The meaning of what he read was plain: "Come here as early as possible to-morrow. Bring Stuart, or some friend. Affair of honor."

Here was an opportunity for the diplomatist, and he took it instinctively.

"What made you bring me this?"

"To find out what was in it, monsieur."

"Monsieur Blake never read it to you, you know."

"Monsieur is quite right."

"Why did you tell me a lie?"

"Because Monsieur Blake is in trouble, and I want to help him. I knew it was the only way to

make monsieur read what was not intended for him. I am used to gentlemen."

Temple smiled in spite of himself at her cleverness. But the smile was of short duration. The matter was too grave for smiles. He saw now why Grafton had made him the stiff, uncharacteristic little speech about always thinking well of him. He recalled the anguish in his face when he had told, so simply and badly, of his love for Suzette. The words, "if I live," rang pathetically in his memory. Many things grew clear to him, and with the light came the terrible suspicion that he, Temple, had been the cause of the present condition of affairs.

While he had stood silent, pondering, Madame Richer had kept her eager eyes on his face, following his expressions as if they had been the pages of a printed book. She read there that the situation was a grave one. Her anxiety broke through her respect, and she spoke.

"Is there anything wrong? Anything threatening Monsieur Blake?"

Temple hesitated a second; then he reflected that the woman might help him, and that she was devoted to Grafton, so he said, —

"It 's a duel."

"I thought so. Then I will speak out, and tell all I know. It is not much to do for him, who has saved my poor boy. Listen to me, monsieur; he is not in this duel naturally; he has been pushed."

"Tell me all you know, and all you suspect. I will act on your advice, but keep you in the dark."

The woman threw a cautious glance over her shoulder towards the half open door.

"If monsieur will come to the Crescent in half an hour, I would rather speak there."

"Very well; I 'll be there."

"And the telegram?"

"I will see to that myself. If Monsieur Blake asks about it, you can say it 's all right. That 's enough" — and not much of a lie for her either, he reflected, thinking of the way he had been beguiled, but grateful to her for it, too.

"And monsieur thinks he can help him?"

"I can," returned Temple with decision.

Madame Richer took a step towards the door; she paused irresolutely for a second, seeming to balance herself on her toes; then she wheeled round, and coming close to Temple whispered, with a jerk of her head in the direction of the dining-room, "*He* knows."

She was gone as soon as the words had reached Temple's brain, and for a moment he stood revolving what she had meant. The curé? In diplomacy one must be bold or cautious according to circumstances. Temple decided to let his first move be a bold one.

He strode back to the dinner-table, before which were seated the curé in a state of abstraction, and mademoiselle in a condition of exasperation.

"Please shut the door," she said testily, the color rising in her cheeks as Temple entered bring-

ing a rush of cold air; "monsieur le curé has a very bad cold."

She could never imagine why she liked this young man, who was continually taking unheard-of liberties, but she had a warm spot in her expansive heart for him, which was probably the reason that she dared scold him roundly at times.

But neither master nor pupil heeded her remark just now. The priest, strong in the knowledge of a precious bit of paper, closer to his heart both figuratively and actually than the blessed scapulary that he always wore, realized, with a tranquillity born of personal safety, that Temple had discovered something. It mattered little to him now; he had earned his reward, his future was assured, but he would be true to his accomplice, the baron. So, half closing his keen eyes, he took a narrow view of Temple's excited face, and braced himself for his first fire.

The young man brushed past mademoiselle as if she were a wax figure, thus betraying his inexperience; for your thorough-going diplomatist never disregards even a woman.

"Tell me," he said, with a touch of authority, — "tell me all you know about this duel of Monsieur Blake's."

The curé brought the tips of his fingers together, bowed his head with a faint smile, and said with difficulty, for he was really ill from the effects of his neglected cold: —

"That tale is a short one. I know absolutely nothing."

CHAPTER XVII

"Oh, Suzette, my darling, darling child, I am so glad to get you back. But you don't look well, dear; are you ill?"

"No, mamma dearest, only tired, and a little cold; this mist is so damp. You and papa are well — he told me all about Paris. But why have you your bonnet on? You are not going out, I hope?"

"No; I 've just come in," said Madame Vernon, untying and throwing back her bonnet strings. "Paul, come here, Paul; I want to tell you the trouble poor mademoiselle is in."

Monsieur Vernon had just brought Suzette back from her week of retreat at Tours, and was puffing audibly in the entry outside the salon door, as he unbuttoned his stiff boots, assumed, with the rest of what he considered his most fashionable attire, for Tours. His other gala garments were composed of an old-fashioned frock coat, made for him long before he had acquired his present portly proportions, so that the waist behind gave the observer the impression that it stopped somewhere between his shoulder-blades, although a judicious retreat of the buttons in front had compromised matters in that doubtful quarter, without loss of

prestige. When he donned this coat, he always wore a stiff felt hat, half-way between a derby and a tall hat, which could be turned to good account on all occasions, funerals or weddings, as the case might be. But the kindly poet hated his robes of state, and always rid himself of them as soon as he crossed his own threshold; so that in spite of her very evident impatience to tell her budget of news, his wife was forced to wait until the puffing was succeeded by a thump as the boots were kicked off, and then came a series of grunts as he struggled to disengage his arms from the sleeves of his frock coat.

"It must have shrunk in the mist; here, you two, take hold and help, can't you?" he exclaimed, coming into the salon, his face purple with his exertions, and the offending garment pinioning his arms at his back.

He had fully expected a peal of laughter from the two women at his absurd appearance, and was prepared to defend himself with a spoilt-child testiness; but neither smiled as they pulled him free. Suzette was too absorbed in herself, and Madame Vernon was too anxious to talk, to be able to enjoy his plight.

"There, Paul, now if you will put on your jacket, and sit by the fire, you will perhaps care to hear what I was told at the presbytery?"

"Begin, my dear; I 'm ready," he said, settling, with a sigh of enjoyment, in all the comfort of a loose coat and dry slippers.

"There is great trouble afoot," Madame Vernon said solemnly. To tell the truth, she was a little worried as to how Suzette would take the story for which she was trying to prepare her. "Great trouble, and mademoiselle is in a terrible state, for she likes young Monsieur Blake, and feels dreadfully for fear he should come to grief here."

"Blake! What 's the matter with him?" exclaimed her husband, sitting bolt upright, and looking grave. He had kept his suspicions to himself regarding his daughter and Grafton, and now noticed with apprehension a sudden stiffening of her body, as if for the moment her breath, her very heart had paused.

"There is to be a duel between him and the baron," went on Madame Vernon desperately, for she, too, noticed Suzette's rigidity. "And mademoiselle learned of it by chance, through hearing the Englishman talking to her brother, the curé, very loud and excitedly — and monsieur le curé is too ill to do anything about it. It seems he was out late last evening, and had a bad cold to begin with — and this morning he said he must see the bishop and went off at daybreak to Tours. He got home at noon, almost worn out, and has gone to bed."

"He 'll do less harm there than anywhere," muttered Monsieur Vernon irreverently. "But can't any one reason with Blake and the baron?"

The poor mother felt as if she were drawing an actual knife across her child's throat, but she

thought it to be the kindest and the quickest way to answer solemnly: —

"No; monsieur le curé told mademoiselle that the only way to wipe out the stain Monsieur Blake has put on the baron's honor is by blood. It appears that he is much too fond of the baronne."

"I don't believe it," said the poet stoutly, and Suzette, in all her heavy misery, felt a faint throb of gratitude at his words. "No, I don't believe it. I 've seen them together, and it 's much more likely to be the Englishman."

"So I said, but mademoiselle told me that — well, that there was not the shadow of a doubt."

Madame Vernon nodded significantly at her husband over Suzette's bent head; he caught the look, contrary to his general habit, being blind to such appeals as a rule, like some other men, and replied in an altered tone, —

"I 'm sorry — very sorry."

For a few moments they all sat speechless, the parents' suffering as intense as their child's — perhaps more so, sharpened and accented by their quivering imagination. Suddenly Suzette looked up; she was pale, but quite calm, and there was no tremble in her voice as she said, —

"I am going down to the church. I should like to be there for a little while."

"I 'll go with you," said her father, glad to make any sacrifice for his little girl; but the mother understood better.

"No, Paul, you 're wet and tired. I shall have

you ill like the curé. Suzette may go alone if she won't stay too late. Trot along, child, so as not to keep dinner waiting."

She spoke almost roughly, but Suzette understood the deep-lying sympathy and hastened from the room without trying to answer. Then the poor mother broke down, and shed the bitterest tears of her life as she rested her head on her husband's shoulder. And the poet's eyes were far from dry.

An instinctive desire to get close to the religion towards which she had felt herself a potential traitor had impelled Suzette to bury herself for a week in the convent; but the certain peace for which she had prayed ardently had not been granted her. She had found the regular services mechanical; the constant clang of the bell, calling to prayer and praise, had exasperated her. And for the first time she had known that the Virgin before whom she had tried to pour out all her remorse was a plaster figure. She had struggled to be more remorseful than she felt; she had tried to suffer mentally, she had insisted to herself on her own unworthiness, and the necessity of giving up all thoughts of Grafton. But strive as she would, the tears came only when she prayed for strength to renounce the man she acknowledged to herself that she loved, and in spite of all her harshness to herself, and her efforts to rise above earthly lures, there was a strong undercurrent of joy that told her she could never be quite wretched while she knew that she loved and was loved. That Grafton

cared for her had become a certainty in her own mind. She recognized and revered his character, surrounding it with a halo of her own making, as is the way with women, and the idea that he could trifle with her heart would have seemed an unworthy suspicion to her. He was her hero — therefore he could do no wrong. So, although she was pale and subdued after her week of mental conflict, — a conflict which had settled nothing as yet, — she was not in despair that time might bring all things her way; and the blow dealt her by her mother's news was a terrible one. It struck, not only at her, but at Grafton; it hurt not only her love, but her pride.

She walked swiftly to the church through the white, clinging mist, which seemed to her excited imagination like a shroud, and went in unnoticed. She sank mechanically on her knees before the Virgin's shrine and bent her head; but at first she was too stunned to pray or think; she could only feel a numb pain. After a few minutes ideas began to hum in her brain. The situation emerged from confusion, clear and terribly tragic. Two thoughts fought for the upper hand; the first, the more vivid, was that Grafton at that very moment was perhaps being killed, and the sound of the shot robbing him of life, her of hope, might penetrate even to the altar steps. The second thought, less poignant, more tormenting, was that he loved the baronne, not her.

In blank misery she held out her hands with an

appealing gesture, but no prayer would come to her lips; she dared not pray that he might be spared, for his words were ringing in her ears — he had called such petitions insults to God. Besides, he was risking his life for a sin. Then her loyal heart spoke, bringing her comfort; she could not believe him guilty of any wrong. Whatever came she would trust him. It was not shameful in her to love him, and love him she would all her life long; and she would be grateful to him for having waked her capacity to know and reverence nobility of soul, kindness, serious aims. To be able to recognize and try to attain to such noble qualities was as much a gift from above as the love she felt for the man who embodied them for her. Yes; he did possess them; she recalled again their last talk together. It was impossible that he who had spoken of God and duty as he had that day could be guilty of a wrong action. She would always cherish the belief that he had some good reason underlying all that he did. Dead or living, near or far, he should have her prayers, but they should be prayers that he would find worthy, not trying to bring about any change in the world's course, only petitions for his spiritual welfare, and calls for help to bear what life had in store for them both. The doubts that he had caused her were swept away as she knelt in the silent church. Had he not said that behind the priests, the saints, the Virgin, nay, even behind the Son, was the Eternal Father? No matter how far they strayed,

each must come back at last to Him. She moved away from the lady chapel, and kneeling down in the centre aisle where she could see the pale gray sky through the clear glass of the window above the high altar, she prayed with the ardor of a convert, not for Grafton's love, not even for his life, but, with a passionate generosity, for the good of his soul eternally.

As the light without grew dim that peace within her heart burned ever higher. It illumined all her thoughts with a white intensity; she felt the faith that moves mountains.

CHAPTER XVIII

The little traveling clock on Temple's table had barely finished striking nine that same misty, moisty morning, before Suzette's return, when its owner sat up in bed, with blinking eyes, and a self-reproachful expression.

"Confound it all! I meant to be up at seven," he thought ruefully, as he made a desperate dash to the floor, and began his dressing in a furious hurry.

There was some excuse for his tardiness, as he had remained with Madame Richer until after midnight, learning all that she could tell him, and on his return to his room had spent four hours making what he called "diplomatic notes" on the situation. These same notes lay upon his table now, to attest to his zeal. The discarded suppositions had been tossed into the neighborhood of his waste-paper basket, and in the intervals of shaving he went over the neat bits of paper arranged in order as he had left them before falling asleep.

Note number one ran as follows: "The curé is an interested party in this duel, as is proved by his attempts to incriminate Diane by the means of Madame Richer." Note number two: "What are his reasons for this conduct?" Note number

three: "Her rudeness to him not sufficient cause for so serious a course of action." Note number four: "Conclusion from foregoing observations; the curé is not the principal in this affair. Query; who is behind him?" Note number five: "Simple process of elimination leaves us the baron." Note number six: "Find sufficient cause." Note number seven: "He wants to marry the Marquise de Lussac? Don't know. He loves her." Note number eight, and the last, summed up the whole affair as Temple had traced it out. "The curé and Ernst first thought Blake their man; but when Madame Richer went back on them, and proved that he was n't, they spotted me. One of the two rascals tossed me the note tied to the feather as a decoy. Therefore I am bound to show up the whole business, not only for Blake's sake, but for my own."

A plunge in cold water had cleared the last remnant of sleep from Temple's brain, and as he read over the result of last night's work the plan that he had formed came plainly back to him. He rang for his cup of tea, and asked the maid who brought it to tell her master that he wished to speak to him at once.

"Pardon, monsieur, but monsieur le curé has gone to Tours by the early train, and won't get home till midday."

"Devil take it," thought Temple, in dismay at the delay. His first idea was to go at once to Ernst, and "tackle" him; but on second thoughts

he decided to have an explanation with the curé to begin with.

The morning dragged along; he dared not leave the garden, for fear of missing the curé or meeting Grafton. In spite of himself he felt like a traitor, taking the latter's affairs so completely on his own shoulders, without a hint to him. The impatient diplomatist lounged up and down in his restricted limits, chafing and fretting. He bowled down no end of imaginary wickets with horse-chestnuts; he smoked half a dozen pipes; he even tried a "go" at his forgotten fable. But nothing hurried matters, and he seemed to have lived three days at least, when he heard the trot of a horse's hoofs coming heavily over the hard road, and saw a station wagon advancing towards the presbytery. It stopped at the gate, and the curé stepped out, paid the driver, received his thanks with a gesture of holy superiority, and then opened the garden gate. He looked ill, but his expression was one of triumph. He had been to the bank at Tours, had held the precious money in his hand, for the baron's check, large as it was, had been cashed immediately; had seen his bishop, left the gold in his keeping to be drawn at need for the repairs of the church; had obtained the permission to preach an advent sermon in the cathedral, and had received the good man's cordial commendation. What wonder that his bodily ills were forgotten in the accomplishment of his burning ambition? His expression grew a shade sour when he saw his

pupil standing squarely before him in the path, but he wished him a courtly "good-morning," and would have passed on, murmuring something about his cold, — for indeed he was very hoarse, — but Temple put out his hand, and stopped him.

"I must have a serious talk with you, monsieur, on a serious matter, and at once. Time has already been lost."

The priest drew up his under lids, as a bird does when going to sleep, thus veiling the gleam that had sprung to his eyes.

"I am a sick man, Monsieur Temple, but I never shirk my duty. Come to my study."

As they passed along the narrow passage leading past the salon, they might have seen the flutter of a blue cap-string as mademoiselle hastily drew back her head from the half-open door; but they were both too intent on preparing for the coming interview to see any outer object, and poor, inquisitive mademoiselle must not be blamed if she snatched an awful joy during the next few moments, with her ear close to the study door, and her cheeks crimsoning with excitement. All the unseen dramas, unheard operas, and unread romances of her whole life were concentrated into that little space of time, and it would be a hard heart that could grudge her the ecstatic thrills she felt at taking an unsuspected part in a real, living "situation."

When the two men had entered the study Temple opened the conversation with no preliminaries. He

had prepared himself according to the most subtle and roundabout traditions of diplomacy, but the first plunge made, he forgot all his carefully thought-up ruses, and said bluntly: —

"I have come, not to ask, but to insist on your aid in stopping this duel between Blake and the baron. You can do it, and you must."

The curé stiffened; he was safe so far as the money went, but he did not care to have his generous patron foiled now. So he bent his head a little forward, emphasizing his falconlike profile, and said with studied calm: —

"Monsieur Temple appears to have forgotten that I told him last night of my ignorance of the whole affair."

"I have forgotten nothing. In my profession memory is one of our weapons and we use it unmercifully," said Temple a little boastfully, "and since last night I have learned a great deal. I advise you, as your friend, monsieur le curé, to tell me the truth."

Up to this moment Temple had considered himself as fairly proficient in the French language. But his last words had scarcely left his lips when the curé burst out into a torrent that overwhelmed his interlocutor.

The old man seemed possessed of a demon of evil; he raised his hands high in air, bringing them down as if cleaving the brain of some unseen opponent; sentence after sentence rolled from his quivering lips with such volubility that his stunned

listener caught not one intelligible word, with the exception, "protections of the law," and "insult." A hard red burned in the priest's thin, sallow cheeks, and his eyes actually flamed. His frequent gestures seemed to show that he was liberally cursing his pupil, who stood silent before him, not in the least frightened, but bewildered, and wondering if he had said anything that would bring down the law on him, as the curé apparently threatened; in which case he would be unable to stand by Grafton.

At last a fit of coughing interrupted the tirade, and Temple, gathering himself together, took advantage of the opportunity.

"Monsieur le curé," he said in English, of which the curé did not understand a word, "I think you 're lying, although I can't make out your jabber, but I can't fight you because you 're too old and too pious. But if this is to be a game of bluff I 'll be hanged if I don't tackle the Jew. Then if that fails I have my fists to fall back on, and I 'm stronger with them than with my tongue. Now, monsieur le curé," he added in French to the bewildered priest, "with your permission I will have my breakfast."

His manner had been so dignified that the curé considered his remarks of a propitiatory nature, and, bowing solemnly, followed him to the table.

The meal that followed was eaten in haste and silence. Mademoiselle's round, baby-blue eyes rested in wide-open wonder, first on her brother,

then on the young Englishman. She could scarcely eat, so great was her interest in what was going on. Her brother's tirade had been plain enough to her, and she had learned that a tragedy of no common sort was unfolding beneath those same round eyes. It was horrible, but if it had been going to take place any way, she was wickedly glad that she had known about it. No sooner had Temple, with a muttered apology, left the room, and she had fluttered off to the kitchen to make a plaster for her brother's chest, than she dispatched her maid to beg Madame Vernon to come to her as soon as she possibly could.

Temple went directly from the breakfast-table to his own room, where he refreshed his memory by re-reading his notes, which he put into his pocket-book, and then set off for the château.

The footman told him that monsieur le baron was at breakfast, and that there were two gentlemen from Tours there; but if Monsieur Temple would take the trouble to go in, doubtless —

No; Monsieur Temple would not take the trouble; he wanted his card given at once to monsieur le baron, with the message that he would wait for him in his library, where he wished to see him on business of importance. The man took the card, and Temple went to the room designated. He had not long to wait; in a few moments Ernst came in, looking extraordinarily buoyant for a man on the eve of a duel. He made no gesture of shaking hands, and, as Temple had both his in his pockets,

this might have been because he took the hint thus conveyed, or that he divined in Temple, Blake's messenger. Both men bowed formally, and the baron said, waving his hand towards an armchair, "You wished to see me on a matter of importance?"

Temple took no notice of the offered chair, but answered promptly: "Yes; I wish to have an explanation of one or two matters that took place yesterday."

"Any information that I can give you — charmed to be of use," murmured Ernst.

"To begin, however, I will give you an explanation. When you challenged Monsieur Blake you had hold of the wrong man; I am the one to fight."

Ernst gave a scornful shrug and replied: —

"That is a matter for my seconds to decide; they are here now, and I will send them to you."

He turned towards the door, but Temple stopped him.

"I fancy that what I have to say might be rather nasty for you if they heard it."

Ernst came to an abrupt pause. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

Temple winked his single eye-glass from his left eye, and, fixing the baron, said with deep meaning, "I have had a long interview with the curé."

Félix brought his hand to his mouth, pretending to smooth his moustache, but his chin trembled, and Temple saw it; also his voice was pitched unnaturally high as he said, —

"I hope you enjoyed your interview."

Temple watched him as he lighted a cigarette, and threw himself into a chair; his nonchalance was a trifle overdone, and the diplomatist said to himself, "He 's getting rattled."

After a pause, during which he readjusted his eye-glass with much care, Temple continued: —

"Yes, a long interview, in consequence of which I have come to tell you that a man, or at least an Englishman, does not sit down meekly, and allow himself to be made the dupe of a clumsy conspiracy, even for the sake of such a charming woman as the Marquise de Lussac."

This shot sped home. Félix controlled his features, but gave a start that he tried to hide by pitching his hardly touched cigarette towards the fireplace. The mention of Odile deprived him for the moment of the coolness he had felt on hearing Temple call himself the victim of a plot; for when the man of God had glided into his library the morning before, having passed through Diane's boudoir on the way, he had mentioned no names to his noble employer; he had merely remarked with a significant glance that the pavilion was a very pretty place from which to see the sunset; then he had added that the sunset promised to be fine that afternoon at about quarter past four. To do the priest justice it never would have occurred to him that Félix could have any choice as to which man he was to challenge.

To gain time the baron took a couple of turns

up and down the room, and this having the effect of clearing his brains somewhat, he said quietly: —

"You surprise me by your immoderate language and extraordinary insinuations. Bringing a lady's name into this conversation is, to say the least, indelicate. May I ask what you mean by it?"

"I mean, monsieur, that I am in possession of certain facts; that I know, for instance, *why* the note with the black and white feather was sent me."

This was a bad move, for Félix knew nothing of the means employed by the curé. To Temple's dismay he showed no confusion whatever, but, shrugging his shoulders, turned lightly on his heel, and said, —

"You will pardon me if I tell you that my time is too precious to waste over such childish babblings about feathers and notes. If you have nothing more to say" —

"I have a good deal more to say, on the contrary," interrupted Temple. "I have to inform you that I know of your conspiracy with the curé against your wife's reputation for the purpose of divorcing her and being free to marry the lady whose name you say it is indelicate to mention. It is immaterial whether Blake is the one involved, as was planned at first, or I, who was picked up yesterday at the last moment. The main point to which I stick is that if you persist in this infamous duel with him, all four seconds shall know of the bribery and corruption that brought it about."

"And if they require proof?"

"They can have it."

There was a pause during which Ernst moved uneasily in his chair, crossed and uncrossed his legs, and looked with fierce inattention at his finger-nails. Temple, on whom nothing was lost, spoke again with more *sang-froid* than before: —

"As you see, I am master of the situation, and in a position to dictate my own terms."

"And they are?"

"A written apology to my friend, Monsieur Blake, and a written retraction of any words detrimental to your wife's character," was the prompt reply.

"Supposing I refuse to comply?" asked Félix slowly.

"That is rather a difficult question to answer. If we were in the States I *think* I should shoot you. If we were in England I *know* I should horsewhip you. Here I am puzzled, for I don't like to dirty my hands by meeting you as an equal, but I 'm afraid I should be driven to it."

"All this is very well, very well indeed, monsieur," exclaimed Ernst, turning fiercely like a rat in a corner. "But how are you going to explain and bully away the fact that I discovered your friend with my wife in his arms? Was that a plot, too? Tell me!"

"Whatever explanation Monsieur Blake gave you was perfectly true. If you found him in that position with madame la baronne, it was my fault, as I had spoken to her in a way that would have

been inexcusable, but for the letter you or your partner sent me as a lure. But let us confine ourselves for the present to settling the case in hand. When Mr. Blake's seconds and yours have heard the whole truth no duel with him will be possible. It will then be for my friends to call on you if you refuse to write the two apologies at my dictation. But before I meet you I shall publish the affair, with names in full, in every Paris paper, so that all France shall hear of it. By Jove! I 'll do more; I 'll publish it in the 'Times,' so that the whole world shall hear of it!"

The baron stared at the young fellow standing in exactly the same place as he had at the beginning of the interview, his legs well apart, his hands in his pockets, and he seemed to be seeing a new and formidable personality. He had regarded him up to this moment as a boy, easily manipulated by a man of the world; but suddenly the Englishman's nation became salient in all its force. The slight effort he made to keep his glass in place lifted his left eyebrow, giving him a sardonic expression; the lines from his nostrils to the corners of his mouth were more marked than usual; he was without the least sign of agitation; his whole bearing spoke of aggressive resolve. Ernst was stunned by the thought that this stranger, who had introduced himself into the matter, was snatching Odile from him; and not only Odile herself, but all that she meant, — joy, worldly position, — all, all was going. He went to the window and looked out at

the shining laurel bushes, seeing nothing but Odile's mocking, vanishing face. He wiped his forehead nervously; it was wet and cold. If he insisted on the duel, the future would be ruined, even if that compact mass of muscular humanity without a nerve in it spared his life. If he wrote the apologies, Diane's character would be unassailable, and she would have the upper hand forever. Was there no way out of it? None? He wheeled round, and came up to Temple: —

"If I write the necessary letters, and explain away the affair with my seconds, who are already in the house, then, monsieur, what will your course be?"

"In that case," returned Temple, his cold gaze fixed always on the other's face, "the matter shall rest entirely between us. But you must decide quickly."

Ernst sat down at his writing-table, took up a pen in a vacillating manner, and then, leaning his head on his left hand, gave a suppressed groan. He would *say* anything, but written words were so damaging.

"If I make my apologies verbally?" he said tentatively.

"As many as you like after you have given me the written ones."

Something in the rigid purpose expressed by the words affected Ernst with bodily fear. Yet he could not do it; he could not. With an abject movement he crept up to Temple. He would try to rouse his pity.

"Listen to me, monsieur," he said. "There is my side, too, to consider. You are asking me to give up all chance of the woman I adore — who is worth an eternity in hell — who holds paradise in her grasp. It is for her that I 've done all this — for her, for her! Don't, don't, for the love of God, be so pitiless! As you hope for mercy show some for me."

"I can't understand you when you speak so fast," said Temple coolly, when the baron drew his breath, "and there 's not the least use in my trying to understand, for you have my ultimatum. If the apologies are not written at once, I shall telegraph the story to the papers, and send for my seconds."

"I 'll write, I 'll write," cried the wretched creature, shambling back to the table. He put a sheet of paper before him, dipped his pen in the ink, and then said, "You were to dictate."

"You have kept me here so long that I can waste no more time; it will go quicker if you use your own words."

This was true diplomacy, for Temple had not the faintest idea how such communications should be worded.

Ernst wrote: "Monsieur," — then his head fell on the blotter, and he began to cry aloud like a child.

"Odile, Odile, I can't give you up — I can't — I can't!"

For the first time Temple shifted his position.

"Oh, I say, this is beastly," he muttered to himself in English; "I did n't know a man could be such a rotten coward."

His scorn was roused, and his patience began to give out.

"Monsieur le baron," he said, in his most diplomatic manner, "my time is up. In two minutes, if the apology is not written, I leave for the telegraph office."

He held his watch in his hand, and the baron cast one pitiful look at it, then at the elaborate Louis Seize clock on his chimney-piece, as if the minutes marked by that would be longer. Then with a sigh that was more a groan, he began to write. His hand trembled visibly, and the pen scratched and spluttered, as if ashamed of the work it was put to. The writing was almost illegible, and Temple scowled as he took the papers from the baron, who asked him cringingly if they would do. A word here and a word there was all that he could decipher, until he came to the signatures, clear and decided: "Baron Ernst de Beaulieu" they ran, with a flourish beneath, as if the wretched writer found a faint comfort in showing forth the one point in which he was the gainer.

"Yes, that will do. I have the honor to wish you good-morning, Monsieur le Baron Ernst de Beaulieu," said Temple, with a low, ceremonious bow.

The bow was returned in kind, and Ernst rang a bell.

Temple found a valet waiting to open the door for him, and it was with a confused mixture of feelings that he went out, for the last time, from the old château.

A saying of Balzac's in the "Lys dans la Vallée" came to his mind.

"Yes, adversity *is* a great educator; there 's no doubt of that. I 'm a great deal wiser than when I came; I 'm also at the present time somewhat sadder. But I 've taken a decided step up in my profession, and that is a compensation."

There was yet another compensation, — the friendship that sprang into being between him and Grafton in the interview that followed, when he told him all that he had done and said in his behalf. They agreed that Temple, who wished to clear himself in Diane's eyes, should send her the anonymous note, with the baron's apology, as soon as he reached home, for he intended starting the next morning, after spending the night at the inn.

The two men sat together for a long time, until Grafton, who had kept his eye on the clock, said at last, —

"Well, I 'm off now."

Temple took his hand in a firm grip, and with a look, half merry, half tender, said, —

"Good luck to you! I 'll take Paddy with me while I pack up my traps, and remember, I 'm to be best man."

There was no holding back now with Grafton; he must put it to the touch and either win or lose

all that he held most dear. But he would not fail, he would not, he was too much in earnest; all should be made clear between them now. Thank Heaven, no news of the intended duel could have leaked out, and if he ever told Suzette it would be in the dim future, when no harm could be done by it. Even then it might be betraying Temple's confidence ever to speak of it, so it had better become a thing forgotten. And if she told him what his heart yearned to hear, if she returned his love, all the past might be buried, for would not their present and their future be bliss enough?

He longed to rush at once into her presence, but he kept enough control of himself to ask the maid, who eyed him curiously, for Madame Vernon, whereupon he was ushered at once into the drawing-room. Before the fire sat the poet, his wife's head resting on his shoulder, and Grafton felt the awkwardness of his abrupt entrance, as the lady rose hurriedly, and, averting her face, disfigured from crying, hurried from the room. Monsieur Vernon met the visitor with a severe demeanor, unlike his usual *bonhomie*.

At any other time Grafton would have been struck by their altered and confused manner, but now he was too intent on what he had to say. He plunged at once into his subject.

"Mademoiselle your daughter has returned?"

"She has."

"And is well?"

"Quite."

There had been no invitation to sit down, and the two men stood facing one another. Grafton began to feel the frigidity of the atmosphere.

"Monsieur," he said abruptly, "you must have seen a little of the love I feel for Mademoiselle Suzette, and it is" —

"Monsieur," interrupted Vernon, "before her name is mentioned I must ask you to explain certain reports that have found their way to our ears, and which have wounded us. We are simple *bourgeois*, but our dignity is very dear to us, and we have no intention of allowing our only child to be tampered with. My advice to you is to leave us alone, and go back to your more exciting friends at the château."

"You have heard of that wretched duel, which is not to be, thank God," said Grafton. "If that is your only objection to me" —

"It is, my boy," returned Vernon, beginning to take heart.

"Then will it content you to know that the whole affair was a mistake, for which the baron has apologized? Or must I ask you to give me time to get permission to tell you all the story? I should have to ask another man first, for I am out of it all, and do not care to mention his name, although I am sure he would want me to make use of it."

"You have said enough for me. You are not going to fight, and you will give up your little affair with the baronne, on your word of honor?"

"There has been no affair whatever between us," said Grafton earnestly. "I love your daughter, and no other woman has had the faintest interest for me since I knew her. I ask your permission to speak to her, and tell her that my one wish is to gain her for my wife."

"Her *dot* will not be large," said the poet.

"No, it won't, because I refuse to take a sou with her. That is not our American way of marrying; I want her, not her money! If I can win her love you may make your own terms, and I will settle any or all of my fortune on her, as you may think proper."

"My boy, my dear, dear son!" exclaimed the poet, and to Grafton's intense surprise, not to say embarrassment, he kissed him first on one cheek, then on the other. To his credit be it said that the symbolist was overpowered by this outward visible sign of the unseen affection within; it was not the prospect of the money, pure and simple, that thus impressed him.

"Go, my friend, to the church, where she is even now praying, and my blessing go with you. You may say that you have my permission to tell her, delicately, of course, of your esteem. Then come home with her as soon as you can."

He went to the gate with Grafton, and watched him swinging down the lane at breakneck speed; then he turned away, radiant with the joyful news he had for his wife. "He told his little story about not having cared for the baronne very

nicely," he thought, with a chuckle. "The women will believe it all, and that is the main thing, but I "— here the poet indulged in the symbol of a wink as he went upstairs to his wife's room.

When Grafton reached the little porch with its fine tracery, he paused, meaning to wait for Suzette to come out. Then the memory of his thoughts during the past night, the new humility regarding his own positive views, thronged back on him, and with a gentle touch he pushed open the door.

At first he saw nothing in the gloom; then he distinguished a bowed figure not far from him; his heart told him that it was Suzette. Very quietly he drew near to her, and knelt by her side. It was fitting that he should let her see that he could be yielding. She turned her head at the slight sound, and looked full into his ardent eyes seeking hers; even in the dusk he could see the glad light rush into her eyes, and the color mantling on her pale cheeks; then he took her hand in his, and thus, in the dim, old church, on bended knees, with bowed heads, these two lovers plighted their deep, loyal, serious troth, without one spoken word; a troth that should need no louder vows to be kept as long as God spared them for each other.

When later, hand in hand, they came from the scene of their consecration, the spell was still on them, and they feared to break it. Like two happy spirits they moved through the mist, that now fell about Suzette like the folds of a wedding veil.

CHAPTER XIX

When Diane had left Grafton with her husband in the pavilion, not the vaguest idea of any trouble between them entered her mind. Her short but vivid experience of life in Paris as a married woman had taught her that the marriage tie was an extremely elastic affair, capable of being stretched infinitely without giving signs of breaking. Her own passions being of the most elementary sort, she believed the worst of Odile and Félix. She could not have understood, still less have imagined, the intricate windings that had kept them nominally guiltless. Therefore, when she had been discovered with Grafton's arm about her, it seemed to her that the only thing a gentleman could do under the circumstances was to ignore it. So, scornfully refusing any aid from the curé, who was standing close by, she half danced down the hill to the château. She rustled the fallen leaves like a child, wading ankle deep where they lay the thickest, and saying over and over to herself: "At last; I 've won! At last; I 've won!"

It had not been easy conquering this impassive American, but the very difficulty made the victory the better worth the winning. She laughed as she thought how hard she had worked to gain the love

of an unknown artist, and how simple it had been to bowl over half a dozen Frenchmen in a quarter of the time.

"It 's his Anglo-Saxon blood; they are as cold as icebergs until once they 're started — then! I wonder if I should care so much for him if he had been less game?"

Diane was incapable, as are many of her country people, of picturing a love that rises higher than primitive instinct. Could she have read Grafton's heart, and learned the depth and tenderness of his respect, the mingled delicacy and force of his passion for Suzette, it would have been to her something incredible — miraculous; something uncanny, making a man less and more than human.

So it was a foregone conclusion with her that he, once having held her close to him, once having felt the pressure of his arms returned, should be completely hers. She had forgotten the little girl who lived in the small house on the hill; if she had thought of her, it would have been only with a scornful shrug. Men such as she knew did not marry that kind of animal, and as she had been told that Suzette was well brought up, good, and all that, she could not fancy that she would be very amusing as a companion.

No; it was plain and clear as daylight that she had at last touched the stony heart of the stranger within their gates. And now, when she held the upper hand, she would have her fun out of the situation. He was a spoiled boy. Making a feint

even now of not being able to dine with her! He 'd come just the same, and she would give him a taste of his own treatment. It would serve him right. Even while she settled this in her own mind, she had an uneasy consciousness that it was easier said than done. When she was with him, something intangible seemed always between them.

"But not now, not after this afternoon," she thought, as she rang for her maid, and began a careful toilet for dinner.

The spoiled boy, however, did not appear that night. Monsieur de Beaulieu broke up the dreaded tête-à-tête, having just returned from his visit, but no Grafton.

Félix was in wonderfully good spirits. Indeed his father-in-law looked curiously at him more than once, and wondered what had caused the rush of gayety. He told the old gentleman every detail of the week's sport, asked him of his experiences, to which he scarcely listened, pressed him to eat this or that, ordered expressly in honor of his return home, but he barely looked in his wife's direction, and never once spoke to her.

After dinner Diane could settle to nothing. She walked from one room to another, smoking continually, and scattering ashes as she went. Twice she rang, and inquired if there were any letter for her. It was monstrous! It was impossible! She could not believe it!

Still the blissful certainty remained that she had melted the ice, and her night, though restless, was

filled with happy dreams, which were most vivid when she was awake.

The next morning she remained within doors. Her pride was rising now. The boy was so unutterably spoiled that he might want more encouragement, but he would be obliged to want — she determined not to go one step further in his direction. It was his turn now to take the initiative.

At breakfast that day appeared two of her husband's acquaintances, one of them an officer stationed at Tours, who had been more than once to Beaulieu for the shooting; the other a neighbor. Diane assumed her usual distant and haughty air, and took little notice of them. She was wont to speak of all the baron's associates as "*canaille.*"

No suspicion crossed her mind until a servant said something in his master's ear, after which, with some excuse, Félix rose and left the room.

"Who is it?" asked Diane of the footman.

"Madame la baronne, it is Monsieur Temple."

Then, all at once, she grew uneasy. What were these men here for? They were not dressed for shooting; there had been no talk of it. Why had Temple asked for the baron? They were not friends. What had kept Grafton away? The meal dragged on. The marquis asked detached questions in his absent, courtly manner, bending his head and looking at his plate when they were answered; a method not conducive to garrulity on the part of those questioned. Diane did not make one remark, and the two guests took the burden of

the conversation on their own shoulders, and talked of personal matters. At last Diane pushed away her finger-bowl with an abrupt movement, and, rising, took the arm of the officer.

"We will not wait for Monsieur Ernst. Come to the salon for coffee," she said, leading the way.

Once there she acted her rôle of hostess as ungraciously as possible, seeing that coffee, liqueurs, and cigarettes were served, and then, with a muttered word, left the three men together.

The idea of a duel had taken hold of her imagination. She was quivering with excitement. That would explain everything, and *if* — *if* — no! she must not think of it. She dared not. What could she do? A ferocious joy had hold of her. He thought she was worth risking his life for. He loved her, and that was enough to wipe out all the reticent moods of the past summer, that had made her so wretched, so angry. But mingled with the joy was fear as well. She knew her husband's skill with pistol and sword; she knew that Grafton was ignorant of both weapons. What could she do? she repeated. A mad notion of tampering with Félix's health came to her. If she should mix something for him to drink that would make him dazed? Her ancestresses in the time of the Wolf Catherine would have done so, doubtless. But she could not. A rush of superstition swept over her, and she thought of a vow. Old tales of miracles accomplished by prayer came to her mind, and she turned to the château chapel.

The chapel was a small corner cut out of the old donjon. It had not yet been repaired, and was seldom entered, except by some one of the servants, as the village church was very near, and it had not been the habit of the family of late years to have mass said there. The altar was neglected, and what traces of gilt there were in the decorations were tarnished and grim. A comparatively modern, utterly banal image of the Virgin stood in a niche on the right of the chancel, and here it was that Diane, crossing herself with a little shiver at the loneliness and the signs of decay, knelt to make her petition. The cold, white light sifted down on her fair hair and dainty dress. The mist without pressed close to the windows. The silence was aggressive, and she was frightened by it. It was so long since she had prayed that the right phrases halted, and she stumbled over her *paternoster* even. Then she tried to make her vow, and was embarrassed there all alone. How silly she was, she thought with a stifled laugh, that had the effect of making the silence menacing. What was she here for? she demanded of herself sternly, and the recollection that her whole future happiness might be even now swaying in the balance steadied her. A wave of passionate desire swept over her, and prostrating herself before the dingy blue and white, simpering image, she made her prayer. Save the man she loved, the man who loved her! That was all she asked, surely a trifle. She did not dare ask for any more than that. It would be

enough if he were saved for her. And if he were, if her prayer were granted, she would restore this chapel, she would give a thousand candles, she would make a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Yes, that was it; she would go to Lourdes, and *he* should go with her! She begged forgiveness for her past unbelief and cruel scoffs. If her wish were granted, she would always be a good Christian, and she would convert him. She would do everything but give him up.

And at that same hour, not half a mile away, another woman was kneeling in a church, making her petition.

When Diane rose from her knees she had the thrifty sensation of having accomplished something. She brushed the dust from the front of her dress, and wished that she had remembered to turn it up before kneeling down. Then, crossing herself again, and making a deep reverence before the altar, she left the chapel. As she went up the winding stairs in one of the outside towers, a sound of carriage wheels fell on her ear, and she stopped at a window to see what it might be. The brougham was coming round from the stables, the horses going fast, and the coachman settling himself while he held the reins, as if he had dressed in a hurry. Diane opened the casement and leaned out to catch a view of the front door. The two guests stood there, waiting for the carriage, a footman beside them, who had opened the brougham door almost before the horses were pulled up on their haunches.

As the gentlemen jumped hastily in, he drew out his watch, and Diane heard him say: "Make haste; you 've not more than twenty minutes for the 2.34."

That meant that they were going back to Tours, and in that case, what had become of the duel? For a second she felt half relieved, half disappointed at this thought, but it was dispelled by the recollection of Temple's visit; they had had plenty of time to settle everything since she had left them. It was very exciting to feel that she was the cause of so much tumult and ferment. She understood now why Grafton had not been to the château; it was the correct thing to keep away, and if they met it would very probably unnerve him for the coming interview; there was nothing for her but the usual portion of women, to wait, wait, wait.

The curious, half barbaric superstition that she had felt at first in the efficacy of her prayer kept her calm through the afternoon. She took a long walk with her father over the fog-covered uplands, and reached home in the early dusk laughing and chattering like a child, calling on him to admire the moisture on her long lashes that made her see everything in a silvery haze.

Félix did not appear at dinner, a message being brought by his valet that he had a severe headache, and begged madame la baronne to pardon him. This news suddenly made Diane grave. Why should he have a headache at this time? Was it a blind that hid some move on his part? After she and the marquis had left the dining-room, she

slipped away, and crept up to the landing outside Félix's door. There was not the faintest sound within, as she stood in the dimly lighted corridor, holding her breath to listen. She was trying to make up her mind to knock and ask if he were really ill, when she saw the valet coming towards her with a tray, and gathering up her dignity, she hummed softly to herself in an indifferent manner, and passed quietly along. But the moment that he had knocked, she paused, and it was not until a faint murmur reached her from behind the door that she was able to return to the salon.

"Why am I so upset?" she wondered as she sat down near her father, and took up Gyp's last and most amusing book. "I 've done all I can for the present; if they 're going to fight I can't help it. I would n't go back to pray in that chapel any more for worlds. Now let 's be sensible, and forget it."

Presently she was laughing to herself over the appealing scenes portrayed by that most Gallic of humorists, and wishing that her father had some faint sense of the ludicrous, that she might have company in her enjoyment. It was a pity that he was so old-fashioned in everything, finding nothing droll since Molière's day. If Grafton were here — then she interrupted her own thoughts; suppose he were? He was the last person in the world to be entertained by the witty indecencies over which she was still chuckling. She recalled the utter stupidity of their tête-à-tête evening together, and

at that began to wonder why she had set her heart so firmly on him. He was not entertaining according to her ideas; certainly he was far from flattering to her. He had the most detestable way in the world of letting his eyes grow cold and distant when she was talking to him, looking as if he saw through her, far beyond, and that his spirit had followed his gaze, while it was only his body wearing the semblance of a polite listener. No; he could not be called an ideal lover, but even as she admitted that much, the pressure of his arm as she had felt it the day before, the tone of mastery assumed by him in the affair of the poacher, the latent possibilities of passion that she discerned in his character, made her breathe fast, while every pulse in her body throbbed. He must not be killed by that Jew; he should live, and for her. Suddenly she decided what she would do; she would follow in secret to the place of meeting, and when there her proceedings would be determined by the circumstances.

So much settled, she began again to read, and not until she had finished the last page did she rise from her chair. Her father had gone long before, and it was now past midnight. A sleepy footman answered her bell, and stood blinking as she went slowly through the hall. Her maid, who had been sitting dozing on a settle just outside Diane's door, jumped up as she heard her mistress's step.

"Go down to the kitchen, and bring me some strong black coffee," said Diane, seating herself beside her fire.

The girl looked confused as if she thought that she was still asleep.

"Don't you hear? Wake up! I said 'coffee.' If you can't make it I suppose his majesty the cook can be roused. Go, you stupid."

The maid muttered something under her breath, and flounced away, slamming but not shutting the door. Diane laughed to herself at the temper displayed. While she was alone she arranged what she would need in the morning, for she was sure that the duel would take place at daybreak; everything pointed to that. She laid out her shooting costume, with its short skirt and stout boots, heaped all her sofa cushions on the bed, and then half undressed. When the maid had returned with a pot of steaming coffee on a tray, all was ready for the night.

"Put it down, and now off with you, sleepyhead; I can't bear to see you round; you make me yawn."

Once again alone, she poured out and drank a cup of the coffee, then opened her door, and, having propped herself up with the pillows, put out her lamp. Her plan was to wait awake, listening for the first sound from her husband's room, and then to slip into her clothes, and follow him to the rendezvous. To leave his wing he would be obliged to go along a part of the corridor that she could see from her bed, but before that she would be sure to hear some noise of preparation from his room. *One*, struck the clock in the church tower,

recalling to Diane the motto on the scroll: "Le temps s'enfuit; l'éternité s'avance." She smiled to herself.

"Let it fly, the faster the better to-night."

How still it all was. A starched ruffle on a dressing-jacket, that she put on when she had taken off the waist of her dress, made a queer little scratching sound as it rose and fell over her fast beating heart, and worried her. She turned to one side, and as she did so fancied that there had been some movement in the darkness, either within or without, that she had missed hearing. She held her breath. There it was again! It was something moving on the terrace outside her window. She leaped out of bed and was at the window in a second. Could it be? Was he capable of so much dash? She opened the inside shutter, and then very cautiously undid the fastening, and leaned out. The accumulated moisture of the day was dripping off the laurel leaves; high overhead a breeze had risen, and the vapory clouds were scudding before it. Somewhere hidden behind them was a waning moon, and in spite of the mist it was fairly light. Diane strained her eyes. He might be there, close to her, and not suspect her presence. She left the window and groped about for a match, which she lighted, and, returning, waved about; surely, if he were there he would see that. And understand it? Perhaps.

Ah! What was that? Only the wind? Yes, that was all. It had made a stealthy swoop among

the trees and bushes, and the boughs creaked, while the drops fell faster from the laurels. Diane shivered. It was evident that she had heard nothing, and she fastened the casement, and crept back to bed. But the shiver gained strength, partly from the damp cold, partly from her shaken nerves, so she reached out for the coffee and drank what remained. It was lukewarm, and sickened her. Then she cowered down, and after a little while the chill left her, and she must have dozed, for all at once she was aware that she could make out the objects in her room. She lit another match, and looked at her watch. Half-past six. Oh, how dead with sleep she was. She threw on her wrapper, and went on tiptoe down the corridor to Ernst's door; his boots were ranged outside, those that he had worn yesterday; also the tray that his valet had brought up to him on the previous evening. Still that told nothing; he could have dressed, and left the house without disturbing either. She put her ear close to the lock. Not a sound. There was nothing for it but to keep her watch until he rang his bell. So for another hour she sat facing the dark entry, her eyes hot and smarting, her nerves twitching and jumping from the agitating night and the strong coffee. At about quarter of eight she caught the trill of a bell rung far down in the servants' quarters, and presently the valet came softly along, a jug of hot water in his hand. Then, and not till then, did she realize that her vigil had been in vain. In her turn she

rang her bell, and when the maid came, looking sulkier if possible than when they had parted, she gave orders that she was not to be disturbed until it was time to dress for breakfast, unless monsieur le baron were going out.

"Stop," she interrupted herself; "go and ask for me how he is this morning."

In a minute or two the maid came back.

"Monsieur le baron is still suffering, but will be at breakfast, as he is taking the afternoon train for Paris. And if madame la baronne wishes to look out for another maid" —

"With all my heart, but don't talk now. I 'm sleepy."

When Diane, four hours later, ran down to breakfast, refreshed by her nap and her bath, she came across a groom carrying the baron's valise and hat-box.

"This mystery can't last much longer," she thought to herself.

Her father and husband were both in the drawing-room, and as she entered the butler threw open the double doors leading to the dining-room. Diane took her father's arm, and they went in. On her plate lay an envelope, and the color rushed to her cheeks as she saw the handwriting.

"When did this come?" she asked sharply.

"Madame la baronne, not two minutes ago; in fact it was given to me as I was on my way to announce breakfast."

She tore it open, without any excuse to the

others; the marquis was helping himself to a choice collection of *hors d'œuvres*, and paid no attention to her, but Félix watched her closely.

She gave a hurried glance down the first page, and then sat quite still, with the sensation that some one had dealt her a stunning blow between her eyes. The servant was at her elbow, and she laid the note down, and made her choice as carefully as her father had made his, to judge from appearances. She ate two or three mouthfuls, and then, with a hard break in her voice, said: —

"Here 's some news that interests me. Monsieur Blake writes that he is engaged to the daughter of our neighbor, Vernon, and sends all sorts of grateful messages to us for our hospitality, and so on. He is going back to America by the Saturday steamer to see his mother, and begs us to excuse him for his apparent neglect, but his time is short. They are to be married early in January, it seems."

"Ah? A very suitable match, it appears to me," remarked the marquis.

"I suppose now that you 'll be in a hurry to get back to the gayeties of Paris?" said Ernst.

He had his own urgent reasons for wishing to keep her in the country just now. His hint worked as it had once before.

"Thank you; I came here for the autumn, and I shall stay."

"Ah, by the way," said Monsieur de Beaulieu, looking up at his son-in-law, "how are you to-

day? We were told you were suffering last evening."

"Thanks; I am better."

"You don't look over robust," said his father-in-law, with his gentle, indifferent voice.

Félix made no reply, but sipped the milk that had been brought for him. Indeed he looked very ill; his eyes were dim, and the flesh hung in bags beneath them; the color of his face was yellow, and his hands were hot and dry. Apparently he had lost complete control over his muscles, for he made involuntary movements from time to time, and once knocked over the glass jug holding his milk.

"Are you going to Paris?" asked Diane, turning suddenly to him.

"I am. If I see Monsieur Blake, have you any message for him?"

"No, none," burst out Diane in hot anger. "This has been a good lesson to me, to let artists and literary people alone. The moment you step out of your own surroundings, you are sure to find out your mistake sooner or later. This fellow seemed like a gentleman, but — he 's an ingrate."

"Why?" asked Ernst, with a lurking smile.

"I can't see that the young man has done anything out of the way," remarked the marquis, before she could reply.

"He 's a pick-plate and a tuft-hunter," persisted Diane.

She could have forgiven him everything but that last night. Every wakeful moment rankled.

Her violence silenced her father, who looked pained, and the meal was finished almost in silence; also in silence they sat round the fire, and sipped their black coffee and liqueur. At last Diane faced about towards her husband.

"When do you start?" she asked. His presence had begun to work on her nerves.

"As soon as the mail arrives," he replied, and then, turning to the butler, asked if the postman had not come.

"He 's late to-day, monsieur le baron; I will bring up the letters as soon as they come."

Diane took a cigarette, and drew a few breaths; then she threw it into the fire; it made her sick and dizzy. She rested her chin on her hands, and sat staring into the dancing flames.

"I wish he were burning there and I was looking on."

Her anger stifled her, and she wondered if she would ever get over it, but at that moment the appearance of the butler with the mail changed the train of her thoughts. Ernst went quickly to the man, and taking the pack of envelopes ran his eye over the addresses. At one he stopped, held it, turned it over, and then said to his wife, "This is the only one for you."

She took it listlessly enough, tore it open, and then, glancing at the signature, laughed.

"At last her ladyship has taken the trouble to write to me. It will interest you more than it will me, so you may listen," she said, throwing a look

over her shoulder at Ernst. She never gave him any name when she addressed him.

"As you wish," he replied.

"'My pretty princess in your magic castle,'" began Diane, "'were you very much annoyed when I slipped away from the glamour surrounding you, without one word? You will forgive me when you learn that my important business was no myth, but the final arrangements that had to be completed before announcing my approaching marriage to Comte Henri de Brimont. Please tell your husband for me, and share with him my thanks for your hospitality, and the charming glimpse you gave me of your enchanting home. I shall always keep a memory of my princess in her tower, with knights below struggling to win her, while the genius of the place is the only one to possess the golden key to her heart. Hoping to see you both in Paris before long,' et cetera, et cetera," broke off Diane. "Well, I step down. She is the most wonderful woman that ever lived. All her life she's had the love of Christians, the money of Jews, and now has secured respectable domesticity for her old age."

"I forbid you to say one word against her," came in a hoarse whisper from Ernst. He parted his lips as if he were about to say more, but no sound came, and he walked unsteadily from the room.

"Carriage? There?" Diane heard him say in a curiously confused way, and then there was a

heavy thud. She went to the door, and looked out. Two of the servants were supporting their master's head, and the valet looked up at her with terror in his eyes.

"Take him to his room," said his wife, "and the carriage may go for the Amboise doctor at once."

No; Odile had not known how much he loved her. It had been a love strong enough to conquer the aim and ambition of his life, to make his wealth only a means to win her, to break down his health. But it had been weaker than the innate cowardice, bred in his bone, the inheritance from generations of ancestors who had been hounded through Christendom for centuries.

CHAPTER XX

In spite of Grafton's absence the days flashed by in the Vernon household, there was so much to be done, — all sorts of pretty things to be bought at Tours, making it imperative to go there at least twice a week, — all the old duties to be attended to more carefully, more tenderly than ever, — more devotion to be lavished on home, to silence the bubble of joy that would gurgle up in Suzette's heart whenever she thought of the new, wonderful life opening out before her. The auguries were all of an auspicious nature. The father and mother felt merely the natural reluctance to part with their child, but had no misgivings regarding her future husband, who had won their hearts with hers. His liberality in money matters, his promise that Suzette should always be free to come and go as she pleased, above all his love for their little girl, went far towards consoling them for her loss; besides which, they had each other.

Suzette saw now with clearer eyes their mutual dependence, and realized that her mother felt even more delight in giving than her father felt in receiving her always ready sympathy. The poet was composing an epithalamium in honor of the coming event, and no matter how busy Madame Vernon

was she was called from the most delicate of household matters to hear a new simile, or to lose herself in the bewildering meshes of an original metre. Formerly Suzette had been impatient at such frequent demands, but now she smiled softly when she saw the quiet, sustaining satisfaction underlying her mother's undemonstrative manner, and she prayed that Grafton might have the same need for her responsive interest that her father had.

There was a deep relief, too, in knowing that they were beginning life, Grafton and she, with a mutual understanding on its gravest subjects. Each had made certain concessions, and they had solemnly agreed that the details of their separate beliefs should never be discussed between them; they both acknowledged the same First Cause, and beyond that nothing mattered very much.

Early in December the first letter came from Grafton, telling of his voyage, his welcome from his mother, who was in despair because she dared not make a winter passage so as to be present at the wedding, but who sent her love to her daughter-in-law, and an assurance that for the future she would always find a home waiting for her.

"Not a month more," sang Suzette's heart, and "Not a month more," thought the mother with a quick pang for herself.

"What? Tours again?" said the poet testily, one cold morning about the middle of the month, as he heard the orders given for the calash to be brought to the door.

"Yes, dear; we told you last evening."

"Never! You neither of you ever consult me now. It 's a perfect surprise to me," he grumbled.

"But, papa, you asked us to buy you some more of that mauve writing paper, don't you remember?"

"Oh, well, have your own way, have your own way. What train shall you take back? Or did you tell me that you meant to stay there a week?"

Both women laughed.

"We shall try to get the 5.10, but monsieur le curé is to preach in the cathedral, you know, and as we want to hear him, we may be later."

"I 'll go with you," exclaimed Monsieur Vernon suddenly. "We will stay there to dinner, and I may get an idea for my epithalamium. I 've often noticed that one's mind absorbs poetic fancies merely sitting still in a great building, and if there are candles, so much the better; they hypnotize me, and fill me with inspiration."

This turned the shopping expedition into a merry-making, and a happy trio it was that set forth. That afternoon, the errands all done, the frocks all tried on, they met at the cathedral steps, and went in through the swinging doors together. They were rather early, but already there was a large congregation, and the seats nearest the pulpit were filled. They sat down a little at one side, and Suzette fell on her knees. Was she praying as she knelt there motionless? She could not have told, for she was conscious only of a flood of grateful emotion. Life would not be all easy,

trials would come, but God had been good to her; He had left her her ideals, and with his help she would live up to them.

Gradually she became aware of herself and her surroundings once more, and realized that the church was very cold, and heard her mother whispering to some one in front.

"Yes, the curé of Beaulieu," she was saying; "his sister is a very dear friend. The poor thing is worn out nursing her brother through an attack of bronchitis, and had to give up coming to-day."

"You seem to have a great deal of illness," said a voice that Suzette did not recognize. "I understand that the Baron Ernst is very bad."

"Yes; complete nervous exhaustion, I am told; business troubles, I believe."

"And they say that his wife never sees him, but has the château filled with company?"

"So we hear," said Madame Vernon, "but we hardly know the family."

It was useless trying to collect her thoughts while this conversation was going on, and Suzette rose from her knees, feeling jarred upon.

In the mean time the cathedral was becoming more and more filled up. The rumor had been spread that the preacher for this afternoon was the possessor of great eloquence, and the curiosity to hear him had brought a number of persons to the service who were as a rule given to more worldly pursuits. The sound of whispers and the scraping of chairs made a confusion of sounds, which an-

noyed Monsieur Vernon, who scowled irritably at each newcomer, and moved restlessly from side to side on his narrow seat.

"It 's an insult to expect an able-bodied man to perch on these confounded stools of penance," he whispered, or rather growled in his wife's ear; "they 're meant for scraggy monks, or starved nuns."

"Hush," said Madame Vernon, "the service is beginning."

The Bishop of Tours was present, and in the train that accompanied him marched the curé of Beaulieu. He bowed his head, but his heart was lifted up with pride. He gave a quick side glance, and the exultant blood rushed through his veins as he noted the size of the congregation, his instrument on which he was to play as he listed, swaying them as one individual, according to his will, and judging by the effect produced on them what methods to pursue when he stood in Notre Dame at Paris.

He followed the service mechanically, moving his lips, but making no sound, saving his voice for the sermon. He had no notes, but he knew well what he would say. He would rouse the people to enthusiasm, he would crush them with fear, he would render them as hysterical as a silly woman. Every word that he meant to say, whether he called them to repentance, hurled threats of hell at them, or told in softened accents of the efficacy of atonement, had been the subject of careful study, and

no actor had ever worked more minutely, weighing every syllable, than the priest who would give the impression that he was one inspired by heaven, and moved by a force that he could not control. He was imbued with the sense of his own power as he bowed or knelt according to the rubric. He felt like a mighty eagle hovering over his prey, only waiting to make one swoop, and seize it in his talons. He would make the world aware of a power greater than that of the brute, the power of the intellect, embodied in him, — him, the obscure village curé; and when Christendom was at his feet, he would turn and point at the bishop who had kept him buried in oblivion all these years; he would first taste victory, then revenge.

The early December twilight fell softly into the vast building, filling up the unlighted spaces, and concentrating all eyes on the pulpit. At last the moment for which the priest had waited years had come; he was receiving his bishop's blessing, and turning towards the congregation, he bent one look on them before kneeling in silence to invoke divine aid on his efforts. In the interval there was a rustle as the people settled into more comfortable attitudes, and a mighty clearing of throats, and coughing. As the curé rose, a deep silence fell over all; the light beside him brought out distinctly every line in his strongly marked face, and glittered in his eyes. He placed his hands on the cushion before him, and leaning forward parted his lips. At that moment he felt like a god; the sea

of faces before him was his, and he would make of it what he wished. The triumphant presumption of his thoughts influenced his body, and his unquailing glances darted through the cathedral. He had forgotten his bodily infirmities; he hardly remembered how weak and ill he had been the day before. The one thing that troubled him was a weight on his chest which seemed to crush the breath out of him. He was aware of this pressure as he opened his mouth to speak.

"In the name of the Father" — he began, but only a hoarse, guttural sound came from him. He coughed nervously, and proceeded, "And of the"—

He could not make even the hoarse sound now; only a raucous whisper.

With an effort, as if he were pushing a millstone from about his neck, he strained his voice to his utmost,— the voice which was his stock in trade, without which he was as nought. But the millstone hung heavier than ever, weighed him down, down, down on his knees. Before them all he sank, his hands clutching at the cushion, his eyes staring wildly. He saw that there was confusion and embarrassment among his colleagues; he caught the words, "It 's a fit," and yet he was helpless; he could make no sound. "Oh," he thought suddenly, with a sensation of relief, "this is a nightmare; it is not true; I shall wake soon," and he tried to laugh out in his joy. But the moment passed; a step ascended the narrow stair, and one of the canons put his hand gently on the kneeling priest's shoulder.

"You are ill, monsieur le curé; come with me," he heard whispered in his ear.

But he shook the hand off impatiently.

"Give me time; I am not ill," he tried to say, but the words were only a confused sound, and he could see that the good canon was frightened.

"It is some trick of the devil! It is the bishop's jealousy!" he did his best to say, feeling the wildness of despair. But still he was impotent. Then he turned his face once more towards the congregation; they were huddling together in agitation; one woman fainted, and he saw their white faces, and noticed the confusion among them. An insane hatred rose in his heart; the weakest, most feeble among them had a voice, with nothing to say, while *he*, with untold treasures of eloquence stored up, had no power to bring it forth. Good God! How he loathed them all, human sheep huddled there in imbecility! Obeying a sudden impulse, he leaned far over the pulpit, and, turning his face from side to side, shook his clenched fist at the terrified people, the curses in his heart and on his lips seen and realized, but not heard. The next moment he had turned, and was walking quietly down the winding stair behind the trembling canon. Without stopping even to bow to the altar, he went to the sacristy, and putting on his hat after leaving his vestments thrown on the floor, stepped out into the winter gloaming, and turned immediately in the direction of the best-known physician of Tours. By the time he had reached his house, he was calm

and self-possessed. The doctor was at home, and there was no delay. The curé picked up a bit of paper, and wrote in a clear hand his trouble. The doctor read it, nodded his head, and then bellowed out a request in his loudest tones that his patient should open his mouth. The curé smiled bitterly, and wrote, "I am not deaf, dear sir."

In the interval that followed the doctor whispered. And the result of the whisperings was that a long, absolute rest must be tried first of all, accompanied by steamings, and gargles, and tonics.

"Not a whisper for a long time, my dear monsieur le curé," hissed the man of science.

"How long?" wrote the man of God.

"Come to me in two months, and I will tell you," was the cautiously murmured reply. The curé bowed, and, rising, stepped out once more into the chill gloaming. He had read in the doctor's manner that his case was almost hopeless. He was an old man, he had staked all on the hopes of the next few years, and he had lost.

"Le temps s'enfuit; l'éternité s'avance," sang in his brain, lashing him with thoughts like scourges. He had lost time; would he gain eternity? He hurried through the dim streets towards the station, desperate, wild in his terrible silence.

Suddenly an idea came to him, and a strange laugh gurgled through his thin lips. He would get some good out of his misfortune after all; he would profit by his loss of this world to secure the shadowy one to come. Did not the Trappists

base their hopes of salvation on their vows of silence? He would make a virtue of necessity by joining the holy men, and his perpetual silence here should gain him paradise hereafter.

CHAPTER XXI

GRAFTON and Suzette were married the first Tuesday in January, beginning their new life and the new year simultaneously. The wedding was a very quiet one, and there was a touch of poetry about it that even the symbolist could not disturb.

Austin Temple had kept his promise, and arrived at the Silver Crescent the night before, full of good spirits, with a photograph of a clear-eyed, broad-shouldered English girl in his breast pocket, which he showed to Grafton with pride and happiness, and with hints of another wedding to take place at Easter.

He "kicked" a little upon hearing that his self-assumed task would require him to wear evening dress in the morning, and to lead about the church the maid of honor, who would collect the offerings of the congregation in a small bag. But he submitted at last when Grafton dilated on the pretty looks of the young lady in question, and also suggested that no experience could come amiss to a diplomatist.

There had been more trouble with Monsieur Vernon; the poet wanted to dress his part with startling originality, and flouted the notion of appear-

ing in conventional garments. Suzette and her mother were seriously alarmed at his mutterings about primrose colored velvet, and it took the combined tact of them both, to which was added aunt Norah's keen sense of the ridiculous, to convince him that for once he had better dress like the common run of mortals. Aunt Norah had come all the way from Dublin, and charmed her new nephew by her airy good-breeding and quaint fun. Together they consoled the afflicted poet, and induced his wife to agree to his wearing a flowing cravat of pale yellow, and a huge yellow carnation in his button-hole, Grafton quoting with much gravity, to aunt Norah's delight: —

> "There let Hymen oft appear
> In *saffron* robe, with taper clear."

The party that sat down to breakfast after the ceremony was small, but full of good-humor, and ready to be pleased. Mademoiselle was there, in all the glories of a new cap with cherry ribbons, and a trembling tear in the corner of her blue eye. It had become the fashion to speak of her as "poor" mademoiselle, but in reality she had never been so calmly happy as since the curé's sudden resolve to join the Trappists. She had moved all her precious belongings into a pretty cottage a little further from the church, where she spent her days in peaceful duties, kindly but firmly governed by the respectable couple she had engaged as servants. There was a slight embarrassment in her manner of greeting Temple, as he had left the presbytery

under a cloud of episcopal wrath, but he was so frankly glad to see her again, so outspoken in his gratitude for her past kindness, and so confiding in his new happiness, that one by one her barriers gave way, and when he clinched the matter by showing her his precious photograph, her romantic old heart fairly melted, and she gave him a smacking kiss, which brought the eyes of the assembled guests upon them, and the faded roses to her cheeks.

At dessert there was a slight pause in the gay wagging of tongues, and the poet rose, a bit of parchment tied with a broad yellow ribbon in his hand. Some one said, "A poem," and the silence became more general.

Monsieur Vernon cleared his throat, unfastened the knot of ribbon, and casting his eye about him said in a tone of profound gravity, "An epithalamium."

Very few present knew the meaning of the word, so that the majority were deeply impressed.

There was another pause, Madame Vernon looked nervous, the color rushed into Suzette's cheeks, and the guests settled themselves comfortably.

Then, in a deep tone, the poet began: —

AN EPITHALAMIUM.

The poplar branches are sere and bare,
Out of the North comes a pale green blast,
Bearing gossamer memories from the past, —
Looks in my eyes with Hellenic stare.

Low in the Orient Orion's sword
Gleams on the velvet woof of night,
And while we gaze with royal delight,
Flashes a star from the zenith broad.

This star so chaste in its samite robe,
So"—

But here the great poem came to an untimely end, for the father conquered the bard, and his voice broke. No one else could have imagined that the well-behaved star in white was intended to represent Suzette, but the image was very vivid to Monsieur Vernon, who suddenly found himself realizing that his little girl was no longer his, and that the place which had known her should know her no more in the same old way. His eyes filled with tears, a sob rose in his throat, and he made a vague, appealing gesture towards his wife, who responded by a gay little nod of her head, belied by the trembling of her lips. Temple came boldly to the rescue, rose, and in a very funny speech, made still funnier by his broken French, proposed the health of bride and groom, thus diverting the attention of the company from the agitated parents.

It was but a passing cloud, and at the last moment both Monsieur and Madame Vernon were able to join in the glad farewells which followed the two travelers down the lane on the beginning of their journey through life.

Grafton was to drive Suzette to Tours that afternoon in a dog-cart, from which place they were to wander slowly southwards. Paddy, di-

vested of the white satin ribbon that he had worn at the breakfast, causing him untold annoyance and humiliation, sat at their feet. Grafton had a sensation of seeing Suzette for the first time that day; the figure in misty white had been lovely to look upon, but not quite real; now he had found his own Suzette in the girl who sat beside him in her trim English traveling dress, and met his gaze with the sweet, honest light from her sunny eyes.

According to a promise already made, Grafton drew up at the door of the Silver Crescent just as the omnibus from the château left it, rattling along the road towards Amboise. It was piled high with trunks, and half a dozen servants were in the interior.

Madame Richer, who had hurried them along, turned with a beaming smile to greet Grafton and Suzette.

"How do you do, *Madame* Blake?" she asked with a low curtsy.

Suzette laughed and blushed, while Grafton leaned over, and took the landlady's hand in his for a hearty clasp.

"Monsieur's wedding has brought me good luck; I have heard from René."

She took an envelope from her pocket with an air of pride.

"Good," cried Grafton; "what does he say?"

"Nothing but what is pleasant to hear. He has a nice place as under-gardener already, with permission to shoot rabbits if he wants to."

"Write me sometimes when you hear from him," said Grafton, gathering up the reins; "and now we 'll be on our way."

"Wait a moment till this carriage goes by," said Madame Richer. "The château people are leaving for Paris, all but the baron, poor man, who is still sick in his room."

As she spoke a victoria dashed past, coachman and footman on the box looking straight before them, and alone in the carriage was Diane, her head held as stiffly in the same direction as her servants' as though a magnetic needle drew all three. She turned neither to the left nor the right; her finely cut features were well defined in profile; there was a flash of sables, and a touch of color from a bunch of violets she wore in her breast; that was all.

Grafton's horse started at the rapid trot of the pair passing him, and for a moment he had his hands full; when the animal was calmed, they were quite a distance from the inn. Then Grafton turned, and waved a farewell through the soft haze of the winter day to the landlady standing beneath her sign, and the last view he had of the little place was a glimmer of pale sunlight on the gold earrings and flashing teeth of the smiling hostess, while a ray stole up and caressed the shimmering tips of the Silver Crescent.

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